M.T.S
Copy

# THE MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

## A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF
## UNITARIANISM IN ILLINOIS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF DIVINITY

DEPARTMENT OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

BY

WALTER E. Wells STEPHENS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE, 1948

TABLE OF CONTENTS


Page

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . . iii

INTRODUCTION . . . . . 1

Chapter

I. THE LOCATION OF CHURCHES IN ILLINOIS . . . . . 4

II. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FOUNDING, THE ESTABLISHMENT, THE GROWTH, AND THE DEATH OF CHURCHES TO HISTORICAL PERIODS . . . . . 13

III. THE CHARACTERISTIC LIFE PATTERNS OF ILLINOIS CHURCHES . . . . . 48

APPENDICES . . . . . 80

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . 88

## TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS


| | | Page |
|---|---|---|
| Map I. | THE CHURCHES OF ILLINOIS . . . . . | 12 |
| Graph I. | THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CHURCHES BY PERIODS . . . . | 47 |
| Graph II. | THE LIFE SPANS OF THE CHURCHES, SHOWING ACTIVE AND INACTIVE PERIODS . . . . . | 79 |

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a sociological study of Unitarianism in the state of Illinois to determine: (1) In what localities Unitarian churches were founded. Are they distributed according to any geographical pattern? (2) Is there any evidence that the persons who founded the church were of any particular social group? (3) What was the relationship of Unitarianism to the historical development of Illinois? (4) Were Unitarians more successful in establishing and maintaining their churches in some periods than in others?

The list of churches in this study is based upon those churches listed in The Year Book of the American Unitarian Association.[1] Several exceptions have been made to the Year Book statistics. The Fourth Unitarian Church of Chicago, All Souls Church of Chicago, and Lincoln Center have been grouped and considered as a single church for the following reasons: The Fourth Unitarian Church was dormant when All Souls was organized, but some of its members and its pulpit (which was borrowed from the persons who had legally impounded it) were present at the first meeting at which Jenkin Lloyd Jones preached. When the congregation organized, the question was raised as to whether the name should be

---

[1] The Year Book of the American Unitarian Association, Boston, 1846-59, 1870-. (During the period in which the Year Book was not published the information normally in it was contained in the January issue of the Monthly Journal of the American Unitarian Association. Cf. introduction to the Year Book of 1870.) The list of churches in the Year Book is the official statement by the Unitarian denomination of the churches in fellowship with it, and its authority is as final as anything can be in a congregational denomination.

the Fourth Unitarian Church or All Souls Church.[1] Although the church gave the date of its organization from this year of reorganization (1882), there seems no reason why All Souls should not be considered a continuation of Fourth Church. The reorganization through which it went at this time was no more drastic, for instance, than that of the Third Church after the ministry of M. Rowena Morse (1912-1922)[2] or the First Church under Dr. Vogt in 1925.[3] Lincoln Center was a development of All Souls church and the services held there can be considered an attempt to revive the church, as distinct from the settlement house. In fact, the church at Lincoln Center was called All Souls at Lincoln Center in the 1934 Year Book.

The Unitarian church at Rockford and the Church of the Christian Union are also exceptions and are considered as a single church. The Unitarian church ceased to exist just as the Church of the Christian Union was organized, many of its members joined the new church, and the former "pillar" of the Unitarian church was one of the most important laymen in the new church.[4]

The chapel maintained by First Church at 57th and Woodlawn is not considered a separate church as it was served by the same minister as First Church and was organized from members of First Church as part of a plan to move the church. The two congregations were never completely separated. Since the chapel and

---

[1]The Year Book of All Souls Church of Chicago, 1907, "A Memoir of Twenty-five Years at All Souls," p. 56.

[2]Curtis W. Reese, Dean of Abraham Lincoln Center, President of the Western Unitarian Conference, and former Western Conference Secretary, Personal interview.

[3]Esther Hornor, History of the First Unitarian Society of Chicago, privately published, Chicago, 1936 (no page numbers in this work).

[4]Harold Shelley, based upon his B.D. thesis now in preparation, Personal interview.

church did not develop into separate institutions, they are considered as one church.[1]

Fifty churches have been organized by Unitarians in the state of Illinois. Of these many lasted only a few years, others lasted for a long period before collapsing, and still others have survived until the present day. This thesis is a study of the organization, establishment, and existence of these churches. Chapter I will discuss the relationship of these churches to the settlement of the state of Illinois. Chapter II will discuss the relationship of Unitarianism to the historical development of Illinois. Chapter III will classify the churches into types according to their lengths of life and explain the causes for the differences in success among the churches.

---

[1]Hornor, op. cit.

# CHAPTER I

## THE LOCATION OF CHURCHES IN ILLINOIS

The scene of this study is the state of Illinois.

> Illinois is almost uniformly level, being situated in a glacial moraine, and is alluvial in all parts with a climate such as prevails in the whole of the Middle West. It is so level that a railway possesses one precisely straight line 100 miles long in which scarcely a dirt cut was necessary--a vast prairie, once largely wooded, now with only ten percent of forest cover.[1]

This plain breaks into a few rolling hills in the extreme southern part of the state, and in the extreme northwest corner the plain rises and breaks into bluffs along the Mississippi River. This prairie is excellent agricultural land.

The Mississippi River on the west, the Ohio and Wabash Rivers to the south, Lake Michigan to the northeast and the Illinois River, cutting diagonally through the north central part of the state, provide an excellent system of natural water transportation. The state thus has easy water transportation to the East, both via the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. A short portage from Lake Michigan to the headwaters of the Illinois River linked the lake and river systems until in 1868 the Illinois Michigan canal replaced the old portage.

It was easy for immigrants to get to Illinois. Settlers from New England, New York, and Northern Pennsylvania could use the Great Lakes. Settlers from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia could use the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

---

[1] The World Almanac, 1944, New York World-Telegram, New York, 1944, p. 301.

The settlement of Illinois began after the passage of the Northwest Ordinance in 1778. The government of the territory was established, and land was sold first at two dollars an acre, "but this was cut in 1820 to one dollar and a quarter. . . . . Under the generous provisions of the ordinance, pioneers poured into the Northwest Territory. One stream sprang from the South, especially from Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky, and flowed into the southern counties of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois."[1] In 1818 Illinois was admitted to the Union, and the federal census of 1820 listed its population as 55,200.

Until 1830 the bulk of the settlement of Illinois was in the south. In that year the northern limit of population density in excess of two persons per square mile was at Peoria.[2]

> There has grown up a traditional interpretation of events sanctioned now by age, that would explain the stoppage of the northern thrust of the southern pioneers by the downpouring of immigrants from the northeast into the valleys of the upper Illinois river. There is little in the sources of information that gives warrant for interpreting the encounter as a meeting of opposing forces. It is true that the immigration of the northerners followed closely on the heels of the backwoods hunters, but this relation in the time of the two movements has only apparently justified the interpretation, for to all appearances the two peoples settled down side by side in peace and concord throughout the state, the southern element naturally enough preponderating in the southern counties and the "Yankee" element in the northern.[3]

While these two groups cannot be considered as opposing or conflicting cultures, they were none-the-less different. "The habit of some writers to classify these southern men as hunter pioneers and to contrast them with the New England and northern farmers

---

[1]Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, A Basic History of the United States, The New Home Library, New York, 1944, p. 181.

[2]Theodore Calvin Pease, The Frontier State, Vol. I of The Centennial History of Illinois, Clarence Walworth Alvord, ed., Illinois Centennial Commission, Springfield, 1918, map facing p. 174.

[3]Ibid., p. 7.

who settled the prairies of the north is misleading unless the contrast is carefully limited and defined."[1] The settlers of the north practised agriculture more extensively. They plowed and fenced the prairie and brought it under cultivation. Their extensive fields contrasted with the woodland clearings of the Southern immigrants. In part this difference was the result of a greater capital investment by New England colonization.

The settlement of northern Illinois began about 1830. Settlers came into this region from New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, both via the Great Lakes and the overland routes. The colonists came into the north with a more stabilized, organized, and cultured background than was brought to the south. One of the characteristics of the immigration into this region is its organized character. An aspect of this organization was the founding of colonies. "In 1833 a caravan of fifty-two people from Vermont, New Hampshire, and northern New York, led by the Lyman brothers, came by wagon to Sagamon county, the country having been previously explored by two of their number."[2] This colony was typical of many founded in northern Illinois. In addition to these organized colonies there existed organizations in New England to promote immigration to the West. "As early as 1834 there was a society in Massachusetts, the Old Colony Brotherhood, to promote immigration to Illinois."[3] This kind of emigration is in contrast with the spontaneous movement of Southern frontiersmen.

With this increased settlement and population commercial centers developed.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 6.

[2] Ibid., p. 178.

[3] Ibid., n. 1, p. 76.

> The city which showed the steadiest commercial development in the decade [1830-1840] was Alton. . . . . It had been some time before Alton succeeded in enlisting the full strength of Illinois on its side. By 1831, however, the city was making rapid progress in importance as a produce market. New England capital came to its support.[1]

The rise of Alton as a commercial center and the presence of New England capital is of significance. The transportation along the Mississippi River developed commercial centers and these attracted New England capital and with it New Englanders. Thus the major river ports such as St. Louis, Alton, Quincy, and Devenport developed a New England segment in their population.

When we turn to the location of churches in Illinois, the noticeable fact is their unequal geographical distribution. Thirty-seven out of fifty churches were founded in the extreme northern part of the state, that is north of or along the present route of the Rock Island Railroad. This route was the old overland route from Chicago to the West and later the water route via the Illinois Michigan and Illinois Mississippi canals. A few churches, four in all, were found in the Illinois River valley just south of this region at Peoria, Tremont, and Delevan in Tazwell county, and at Bloomington. Other churches were founded south of the aforementioned line at Warsaw (across the river from Keokuk), Quincy, and Alton. These towns were commercial centers (Warsaw is best described as a would-be commercial center) where New England capital and New England businessmen were to be found. Aside from the churches in these towns Unitarianism in Illinois makes a feeble showing indeed.

The mission of Jasper Douthit in Shelby county founded three churches: one in Shelbyville, one in the country north of Shelbyville, and one at Mattoon. A very early church was started

---

[1] Ibid., p. 189.

at Hillsboro seventy-five miles northeast of St. Louis, and a church was organized at Jacksonville just west of Springfield. Two other churches were started outside of the region of Unitarian concentration: one in the university community of Urbana (1906) and the other at Monmouth (1882). Thus we find a situation in which numerous attempts were made to start churches in the northern part of the state and along the Mississippi River, a few scattered attempts in the central part of the state, and no attempts south of Alton.

This distribution is an indication that Unitarianism followed New England settlement. The New England settlement of Illinois was strongest in the northern region, that is the upper Mississippi, upper Illinois, and Rock River valleys, and in the commercial centers along the Mississippi River. The culture of this area was transplanted in large measure from New England. The New Englanders came in colonies and organized towns around a square, on one side of which stood the Congregational church. The township as a unit of government was introduced into the north and spread south.[1] Further to the south, as New England influence waned, the influence of people of Southern background was dominant.

The Unitarians concentrated their work in the northern part of the state, for it was there that they felt at home. The records of the travels of Western Conference missionaries recount their preaching throughout the northern region and along the Mississippi River but not to the south. Unitarians tended to regard southern Illinois as a land of darkness into which the light of their message could not penetrate. The common attitude of Uni-

---

[1] Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., 1929, "Illinois," Vol. 12, pp. 86 ff.

tarians towards this region is well expressed by Jenkin Lloyd Jones in his introduction to Jasper Douthit's autobiography.

> Mr. Douthit was a "home missionary" but he expounded a foreign gospel. "About the last place on earth one would expect to find or try to plant a Unitarian church," was the common remark of his friends. Unitarianism was never put to a severer test than when Jasper Douthit sought with it to ameliorate the severities and remove the illiteracy and iniquities of southern Illinois in the sixties and the seventies. Channing's interpretation of the gospel in terms of gentleness and love, Theodore Parker's interpretation of Christianity in terms of justice and freedom to the slave, and Emerson's rendering of the universe in terms of order, progress and peace, were by Douthit set over against Calvinism in its most dogmatic form, the whiskey jug with its fiery contents, and the shot gun with its maximum of civic potency and political prowess, and the sequel shows that these higher interpretations of religion were tried and not found wanting.[1]

It seems evident that Mr. Jones and his contemporaties did not think very highly of southern Illinois. There is an obvious feeling on the part of Jones that Douthit's work is a very remarkable exception to a general rule. Jones and his colleagues at the sessions of the Western Conference looked upon Douthit with considerable amazement because of his ability to make Unitarians in southern Illinois.

The New England basis of Unitarianism is further demonstrated by an examination of the towns in which churches were organized. Tremont, Delevan,[2] Geneseo,[3] and Sheffield[4] were New England colonies. The churches at Alton,[5] Chicago,[6] Geneva,[7]

---

[1]Jasper Douthit, Jasper Douthit's Story, "Introduction," Jenkin Lloyd Jones, American Unitarian Association, Boston, no date, p. iii.

[2]History of Tazwell County, Illinois, Chas. C. Chapman and Company, Chicago, 1879, p. 434.

[3]Geneseo Centennial History, Historical Committee of the Geneseo Centennial Association, Geneseo, Illinois, 1936, p. 11 ff.

[4]Taxpayers & Voters of Bureau County, Illinois, H. F. Kett and Company, Chicago, 1877, p. 143.

[5]Wallace W. Robbins, A Century of Unitarian Religion in Alton, Published by the Unitarian Church of Alton, 110 East 3rd Street, 1936, p. 1.

Quincy,[1] and Rockford[2] had a New England group as their nucleus. The church at Como was organized of ten Unitarian families.[3] In other localities in the northern part of the state the New England background of the churches cannot be as precisely demonstrated as above, but as the whole area had a large percentage of New England settlements such a background would certainly be probable.

—This Unitarian dependence upon persons of New England background is of fundamental importance for the history of Unitarianism in Illinois. It is remarkable that a religion developed by cultivated Easterners, with an emphasis upon reason and education, should succeed at all in a frontier society.

> Contrary to expectations, the less orthodox and more liberal denominations were showing, especially in the Yankee settlements, some ability to move westward with the pioneer. Eight Unitarian groups with four churches existed in 1850 and seven Universalists; the New Covenant, a successful Universalist publication, was established in Chicago in 1848. By 1860 liberal religion had spread in the cities to such an extent that eleven Unitarian and thirty Universalist churches were located by the census enumerators.[4]

For the most part, the early churches were composed of persons who were of Unitarian New England background. In addition to the problem which confronted all church groups, that of making converts in a culture which was not church-minded, the Unitarians had a special problem. They were limited in background to the New England culture. They would disappear if the

---

[6]Hornor, op. cit.

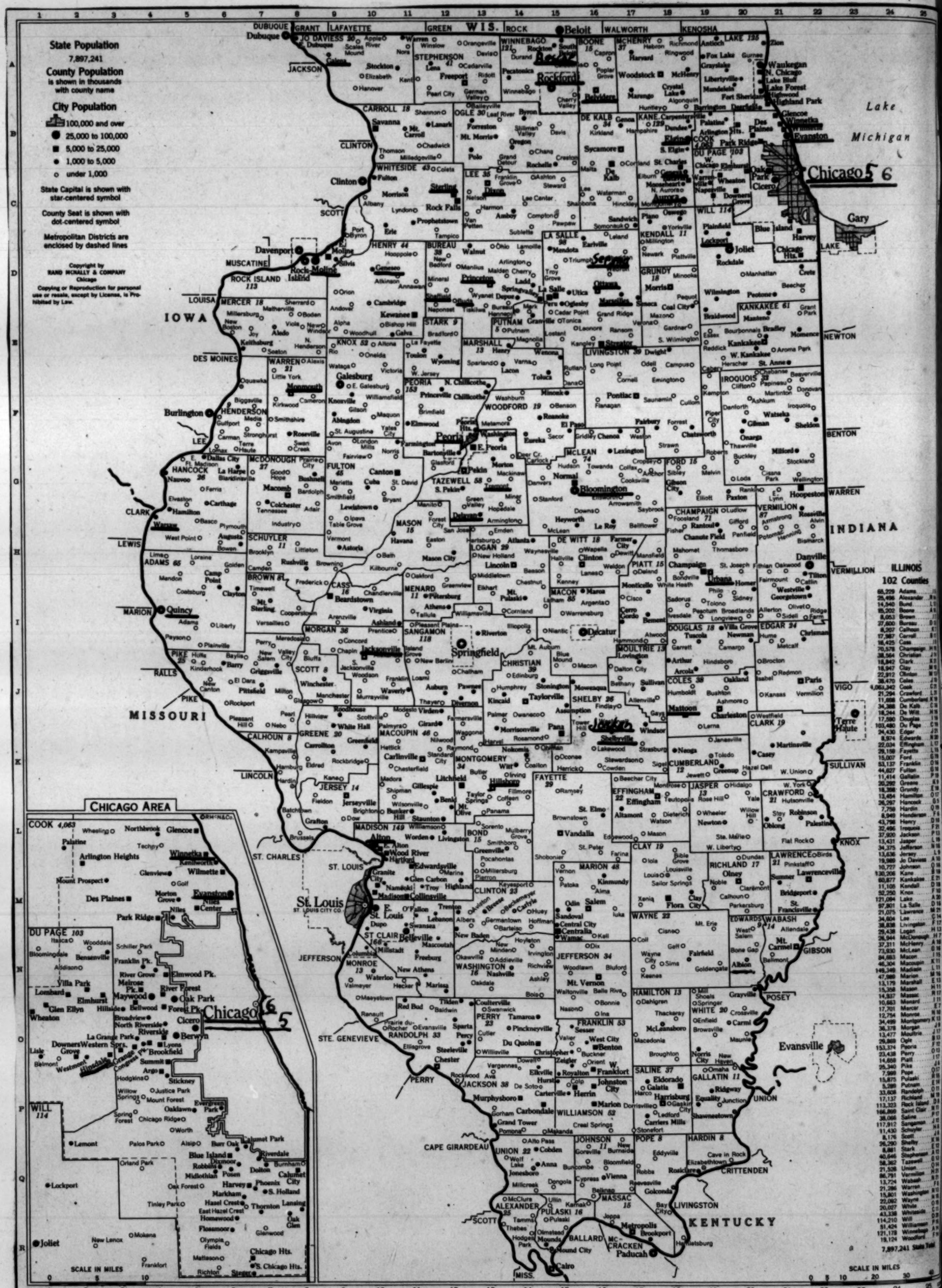
[7]Robert Collyer, A Man in Earnest, Horace B. Fuller, Boston, 1868, pp. 40 ff.

[1]E. B. Montgomery, A Sketch History of One Hundred Years of Unitarian Church of Quincy, Privately published, p. 3.

[2]Harold Shelley, personal interview, based upon his thesis now in preparation.

[3]Collyer, op. cit., p. 105.

[4]A. C. Cole, The Era of the Civil War, Vol. VIII of The Centennial History of Illinois, op. cit., p. 248.




IMPERFECT IN ORIGINAL

# INDEX TO MAP I
# THE CHURCHES OF ILLINOIS

| NAME | DATE | LOCATION |
|---|---|---|
| Alton | 1836-- | L-10 |
| Belvidere | 1846-1848 | A-16 |
| Bloomington | 1859-- | G-15 |
| Buda | (1858-1892)-1928 | E-12 |
| Chicago 1st | 1836-- | B-C-20-22 |
| Unity | 1858-- | " " |
| Third | 1868-- | " " |
| All Souls (4th) | 1869-1932 | " " |
| Peoples Temple | 1887-1888 | " " |
| Swedish | 1904-1917 | " " |
| Independent | 1922-1924 | " " |
| Peoples | (1910-1924)-- | " " |
| Brotherhood | 1932-1938 | " " |
| Peoples Liberal | (1878-1939)-- | " " |
| Beverly | 1942-- | |
| Como | 1848-1850 | C-12 |
| Delavan | 1875-1880 | H-13 |
| Dixon | 1856-1860 | C-13 |
| Elgin | 1847-1857 | B-18 |
| Evanston | 1892-- | B-21&M-6 |
| Galena | 1847-1856 | A-9 |
| Geneva | 1842-- | C-18 |
| Hillsboro | c.1838-1860 | K-13 |
| Hinsdale | 1869-- | O-3 |
| Jacksonville | 1869-1886 | I-10 |
| Lockport | 1851-1863 | D-20 |
| Marseilles | 1850-1851 | E-17 |
| Mattoon | 1867-1907 | J-18 |
| Moline | 1873-1876,1886-- | D-8 |
| Monmouth | 1883-1901 | F-8 |
| Ottawa | 1872-1874 | D-16 |
| Peoria | 1852-1862 | F-13 |
| Princeton | 1860-1876 | D-13 |
| Quincy | 1840-- | I-4 |
| Rockford | 1844-(1870-1928)-- | A-15 |
| Roscoe | 1868-1877 | A-15 |
| Serena | (1896-1903)-1918 | D-16 |
| Sheffield | 1868-1929 | D-12 |
| Shelbyville | 1868-- | K-16 |
| Jordan | 1882-1935 | K-16 |
| Sororo | 1880-1881 | undetermined |
| Sterling | 1892-1896 | C-12 |
| Streator | 1892-1930 | E-16 |
| Tremont | c.1838-1912 | G-13 |
| Urbana | 1906-- | H-19 |
| Warsaw | 1846-1848 | G-4 |
| Winnetka | 1867-1885 | B-21&L-6 |

Note: Dates in parentheses refer to existence outside the Unitarian denomination.

Legend: Active churches red, inactive churches red and black, defunct churches black.

New England culture which had been transplanted to the Middle West was to break up before they became attached to the developing new culture of the Middle West. The history of Unitarianism in Illinois is that of a small group struggling to make sufficient converts to enable it to live when the culture which had given it birth was disappearing. In the next chapter we will see how the early Unitarians met this problem.

## CHAPTER II

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FOUNDING, THE ESTABLISHMENT, THE GROWTH, AND THE DEATH OF CHURCHES TO HISTORICAL PERIODS

The history of Unitarianism in Illinois can be conveniently divided into five periods: (1) The Period of Pre-Civil War Missions, (2) The Period of Post-Civil War Expansion, (3) The Period of Controversy and Schism, (4) The Period of Decline, and (5) The Period of Revival. Each period has its distinctive character. Each period is brought to a close by a change in the character of Illinois Unitarianism; these changes were related to the changes in the environing culture. Sometimes there is a sharp division between the periods: for instance, the Civil War draws a sharp line between periods one and two. Sometimes the transition is more gradual as between periods two and three. Unitarianism was more successful in some periods than in others. As we follow Unitarianism in Illinois through its historical development, it becomes clear that it has had its expansions and contractions. It has varied from period to period, its development has been irregular rather than continuous; but development there has been.

The Period of Pre-Civil War Missions extended from the founding of the earliest Illinois churches, about 1836, until the beginning of the Civil War in 1861. The first Unitarian church in Illinois was probably at English Prairie, in Edwards County, near the present site of Albion. A colony of dissatisfied English

farmers had been lead to southern Illinois by George and Richard Flower and Morris Birkbeck in 1818-1822. The settlement was under severe criticism and the critics "made the most of expressions of pleasure by Birkbeck at the absence of all religious observance on the frontier and used them to brand the enterprise as irreligious; this accusation was met by the building of churches, in one of which Unitarian and in the other Episcopal services were installed by Flower and Birkbeck, respectively."[1] This was probably the earliest Unitarian church in Illinois.

Unitarianism as an American movement did not appear in Illinois until after 1830. The church at Alton and First Church in Chicago, both of which were founded in 1836, are the earliest churches in the state which still survive.

When Unitarianism appeared upon the scene, Illinois was part of the American frontier. The frontier was a democratic but rather crude part of American life. The southern part of the state was already widely but sparsely settled by immigrants from the South. The northern part of the state was in the process of rapid settlement by immigrants from the Northeast. The religion of the frontier was as "rough and ready" as the rest of frontier life. The typical preacher was the Methodist circuit rider. While these characteristics were especially true in the south, all of Illinois was a frontier and affected by frontier conditions. Many people were suspicious of educated ministers, particularly those who came out as missionaries from the East, as the following statement shows.

> The men who were the most successful in the struggle for the conquest of the frontier to Christ were a distinct type, unlearned, well-nigh unschooled, only a stage or two above illiteracy. They had a strong contempt for college-bred ministers as unfit to follow in their footsteps, unable with

---

[1]Pease, op. cit., p. 14.

> their written sermons to get the effects that the native eloquence of the pioneer attained. Men who had spent four years in rubbing their backs against the walls of a college were not the men to ride wretched roads week in and week out, swim their horses over creeks, and by address, by stratagem, or by force of superior muscle defeat the efforts of the rowdies to break up camp meetings. The pioneer preached a christianity emotional rather than intellectual. His exegesis was often astonishing. In the sermon attributed to Axley preached from the text "Alexander the Coppersmith did me much evil," Alexander figures as a reformed still-maker who turned class leader, but who under the influence of a heavy peach crop, backslid, and made stills for the brethren to the destruction of sobriety in the neighborhood.[1]

By the time Unitarians came into the state the Methodists and Baptists were extremely active. The Campbellites, or Disciples of Christ, were also active. The Christian Connection was also an active movement, and the Congregationalists were arriving in the north.

Not only were there unchurched and orthodox in the West, there were those opposed to organized Christianity. According to the early Methodist and Baptist preachers, "Deistic and atheistic belief flourished on the frontier among even the better classes. [Pease says] Evidence is not lacking to collaborate this attitude of mind."[2]

The major social conflict of the period was over slavery. This conflict had begun almost as early as the settlement of the state, for by the Northwest Ordinance Illinois was "free soil." Yet the Southerners who came into the state tended to be pro-slavery in their attitudes. On the other hand the settlers from the Northeast were, on the whole, anti-slavery. The tumult of the rest of the United States over the slavery issue and over all the proposed solutions of the slavery problem was felt in Illinois.

Into this turbulent milieu came the Unitarians. As has

---

[1] Ibid., p. 25.

[2] Ibid., p. 23.

been pointed out before, they followed the migration of the New Englanders and located in the more "cultured" parts of the state. Nevertheless they found themselves upon a frontier with all the characteristics of such a society.

It is somewhat surprising to present-day Unitarians to see how little the early Unitarians differed from orthodox Christianity. The fact that they cooperated with the Christian Connection as a group of kindred spirits is equally surprising in view of the widespread divergence between these groups at the present time. Both the relatively conservative position of the Mid-Western Unitarians and their cooperation with the Christian Connection were illustrated by the actions of the Western Unitarian Conference in 1856. At this conference, the first conference for which records remain, delegates from the Christians were present and resolutions were passed to send Unitarian delegates to the Christian Conference. The Western Conference strove to correct the common opinion that Unitarians were not Christians. It passed a strong resolution, by unanimous vote, showing its adherence to Christian principles. A report which was prepared by a committee to clear up the general misunderstanding as to the position of Unitarianism was accepted unanimously reading as follows:

> As there is a misunderstanding of the views of Unitarian Christians on important subjects, it is deemed proper to make some declaration in reference thereto.
>
> Resolved, That we regard Jesus not as a mere inspired man, but as the Son of God--the messenger of the Father to men, Miraculously sent--the Mediator between God and man--the Redeemer of the world. That we regard the miracles of the New Testament as facts, on which the Gospel is based.[1]

After the report was unanimously accepted, the conference, after

---

[1] Minutes of the Western Conference of Unitarian Churches, Vol. I, 1854-1879, Vol. II, 1879-, Manuscript volumes in custody of the Western Unitarian Conference, Chicago, Illinois, p. 4.

having resolved that the report be printed, further resolved:

> Resolved, However, That under our organization as the Conference of Western Unitarian Churches, we have no right to adopt any statement of belief as authoritative, or as a declaration of Unitarian Faith, other than the New Testament itself, which is the divinely authorized rule both of Faith and practice . . . we earnestly recommend to the Churches and Religious societies here represented by us, to adhere more and more closely to the direct instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ; that they may become branches of the True Vine. . . .[1]

There was, however, an element of "left wing" Unitarianism in the Middle West. An example of this is the sermon of Charles Andrews Farley, the first minister of the Alton church. In his first sermon at Alton he concluded with these words:

> Do you now ask, "Which is the true church?" I answer, not the Episcopal church, not the Presbyterian church, not the Baptist church, not the Methodist church, not the Unitarian church, but the good in all these churches. All who live under the light of nature or under the more blessed light of revelation. The child of the Ganges, who worships the glorious river, and finds healing in its waters; he who adores the Sun in its Majesty; he who cries out for the help of the Great Father and whose dying eyes are lit up with the hope of hunting again in the Spirit land, all, all are the children of God. All are members of the Church Universal, of that vast temple which the broad skies cover and the broad earth sustains and whose doors are open to the illimitable heaven.

The church had the sermon printed.[2] Farley's position was not unusual. Other men came to hold beliefs at variance with traditional Unitarianism.

Precise evidence as to the positions of the ministers in the Western Conference is not available, but the rejection of the miracles of Jesus and his divine office became an important theological position. This was dramatically called to the attention of the Western Conference when the church in Cincinnati split in 1858 because the minister took the liberal position. This split resulted in the formation of the Free Church and the Church of

---

[1] Ibid., p. 5.

[2] Robbins, op. cit., p. 3.

the Messiah. Like former friends who have agreed not to embarrass people by appearing at the same parties, the churches sent delegates to the Western Conference in alternate years. The absent church always reported by letter. The breach was finally healed in 1875.[1]

One practical problem in the Unitarian theological position of the period related to the Deists. Whether or not the Unitarians might have had an opportunity to capture a large number of so-called infidels one cannot say. The only indication of the situation in the West is found in the records of the St. Louis Church. "A number of anti-Christians (Deists) attended the early meetings. Mr. Eliot's traditional Christian vocabulary displeased them. They dropped away."[2]

How typical this was of the relations between the Unitarians and Free Thinkers, it is impossible to say. In view of the acceptance of the Christocentric position, such as Eliot espoused, by the majority of the Western Conference one is inclined to believe that the Unitarians in the early years made few inroads on such groups. They had neither the emotional appeal of the Methodists nor the anti-traditional attitude of Parker.

The fact that both liberals and conservatives were present in the West produced theological controversy among Unitarians. As has been mentioned, the church at Cincinnatti had divided over the theology of its minister. Discussions as to the nature of Christianity and the nature of the mission of Jesus were frequent at the

---

[1]Minutes of the Western Unitarian Conference, op. cit., pp. 110-352, give the description of this schism.

[2]Arnold Crompton, Unitarianism in the Middle West from the First Missionary Venture to the Issue in the West, A dissertation for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, Chicago, Illinois, 1939, Manuscript copies in the library of the Meadville Theological School, pp. 25-26.

Western Conference sessions. The discussions sometimes became "spirited," as the records say. On theology, the Unitarians managed to maintain their "unity amid diversity." On one occasion after a "spirited" discussion of Christianity they came to the conclusion that "all who wished to take upon themselves the name of Christian should be so recognized."[1]

The major social problem of the day, the slavery issue, was more difficult to settle in this tolerant manner. Unitarians in general were anti-slavery. Many people, however, were irritated by the voicing of the anti-slavery sentiments of the majority. Augustus H. Conant reported to the Western Conference that his anti-slavery preaching had displeased many members of his congregation.[2] The conference itself took a firm anti-slavery position. In Alton in 1857 it almost unanimously adopted a strong anti-slavery resolution, following the secession of the St. Louis delegation. The Illinois churches supported the resolution. St. Louis withdrew not because of the anti-slavery attitude of the conference, with which William G. Eliot was in complete sympathy, but because Eliot objected to a congregational conference passing any kind of resolution except on theological and church matters.[3] Despite this difference the Civil War found the Unitarians strongly united in opposition to the evil of slavery. As the Civil War approached, their interest in denouncing the evil of slavery forced the discussion of their theological differences into minor position at the sessions of the Western Conference.

Throughout this period the Unitarian churches were missionary islands in a sea of orthodox Christianity. The churches

---

[1]Minutes of the Western Unitarian Conference, p. 106.

[2]Ibid., p. 75.

[3]Minutes of the Western Conference, op. cit., pp. 90-95.

were few and scattered, and it was a long and difficult trip from one church to the other. The Western Unitarian Conference was organized in 1854 and immediately assumed the direction of missionary activities in the West. It maintained both full time and part time missionaries. William Bradley, a graduate of Meadville in the class of 1850, was one of the early missionaries. He worked as a missionary in Michigan and a little later in northern Illinois. He organized two churches in Illinois (Henry and Freeport), but they did not get into the official list of the American Unitarian Association.[1] The most important missionary of the Western Conference in this period was Augustus H. Conant. Conant's position was part time for he was the settled minister at Geneva and later of Elgin but he devoted a large part of his time to missionary work. His labors began before the conference organized. Conant was the St. Paul of Illinois Unitarianism and made tremendous missionary journeys in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. In the first year of his ministry he traveled 1,844 miles.[2] During these journeys, in addition to his church at Geneva, he organized a church at Belvidere in 1845 and one at Como in the same year.[3] Between July 15 and August 15 of 1843 he went on a tour along the Mississippi River, which included St. Louis, Quincy, Warsaw, Burlington (Iowa), Rock Island, and Galena. The first issue of the Year Book lists churches at Galena, Warsaw, as well as at Como and Belvidere. As there is no record of any other Unitarian missionary operating in this area, it seems probable that Conant organized these churches. By 1846 he had organized a

---

[1] General Catalogue of the Meadville Theological School, 1844-1930, Beacon Press, Boston, 1930, p. 28.

[2] Robert Collyer, A Man in Earnest, Horace B. Fuller, Boston, 1868, p. 102.

[3] Ibid., p. 105.

church in Elgin.[1] He also preached in Dixon in 1847.[2] It seems likely he organized a church here although it was not reported in the Year Book until 1856. (It was also reported to the Western Conference in that same year.) L. C. Kelsey was minister there from 1854-1862[3] and was ordained at Geneva.[4] (This demonstrates that churches sometimes existed before they were reported in the Year Book.) In all, Conant is known to have organized four churches and he probably organized three others. Another missionary who operated in the northern part of the state was Ichobod Codding. Codding was the first minister at Lockport in 1851. He also organized the church at Princeton. In 1859 the Western Conference took note of the fact that "Mr. Codding gave a report of his labors in Princeton, Illinois where he has gathered together the Unitarians, Universalists, and Christians under the ministry."[5]

The origin of four other churches: Marseilles, Peoria, Tremont, and Hillsboro are obscure. They were reported in the first Year Book in 1846. Presumably Peoria, Tremont, and Hillsboro were started by missionaries from the East.[6]

In addition to the churches founded by missionaries local groups organized their own churches. Churches were organized at Alton, Chicago, Bloomington, Quincy, and Rockford. Alton and Quincy received encouragement and aid from William G. Eliot and the St. Louis church. The others operated largely on their own

---

[1] Ibid., p. 105.

[2] Ibid., p. 107.

[3] General Catalogue of the Meadville Theological School, 1844-1930, Beacon Press, Boston, 1930, p. 31.

[4] Minutes of Western Conference, op. cit., p. 38.

[5] Ibid., p. 127.

[6] George Willis Cooke, Unitarianism in America, American Unitarian Association, Boston, 1903, pp. 150-151.

initiative.

Eighteen churches were organized in this period, and Unity Church in Chicago was organized just as the period closed, making a total of nineteen churches. There were never this many at any one time.

The churches which declined and died were missionary churches which failed to become firmly established. Except for Geneva all the missionary churches died or became dormant within ten years of their founding dates. It is sometimes asserted that the Civil War killed a large number of churches, but there seems to be no evidence of this in Illinois. The only church whose death coincides with the war is Dixon. Even here the church was dormant before the war, for in 1859 the Western Conference reports that "Rev. Mr. Kelsey, formerly of Dixon Illinois, gave an account of the cause in that place, where there are still earnest Unitarians, who have not lost their interest in their Faith."[1]

ELGIN BECAME UNIVERSALIST
ROCKFORD LIBERAL CHRISTIAN
NOW UNITARIAN

By the time the Unitarians became engrossed in the Civil War, they had seven active churches, one struggling church at Princeton, and two dormant churches. The others had died. All the active churches[2] still exist in 1945. No new churches were started during the Civil War, so with these surviving churches the Unitarians entered the period of expansion.

The Period of Post-Civil War Expansion begins with the Civil War and ends in 1880. Illinois started its industrialization during this period. The movements which began in this period are described in the following passage.

> The quarter century following the year 1870 saw radical changes in the life of the people of Illinois. A period of

---

[1]Minutes of Western Unitarian Conference, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 118.

[2]Alton, Bloomington, First Church in Chicago and Unity Church in Chicago, Rockford, Geneva, and Quincy.

> industrial expansion began on a scale hitherto unknown in this country: manufacturers enlarged and combined their plants; railroad companies extended their lines in every direction through building and consolidation; cities grew as if by magic. Here were the real beginnings of modern industry with its enormous capital, its monopolistic features, and its widespread economic influence. Politically, the period saw a deep-seated unrest, which manifested itself in the organization of new parties; greenbackers, liberal republicans, and other types of independents divided with the older political parties the attention of the people.[1]

Into this society in transition Unitarianism expanded.

All Unitarians were troubled over their theological differences in this period, but they avoided open rupture in the West because their active work in the Civil War had given them a feeling of solidarity. A list of at least fifty Unitarian ministers who served as Chaplains, soldiers, or members of the Sanitary Commission has been compiled.[2] Of the twenty-nine ministers in the Western Conference sixteen entered the army. The two most prominent ministers from Illinois taking part in the Civil War were Augustus H. Conant, who died as a chaplain, and J. G. Foreman of Alton, who was the secretary of the Western Sanitary Commission.[3] Other ministers in Illinois were active in the support of the war effort. The energies of the Western Unitarian Conference and of the individual churches were largely absorbed by the war.

Immediately after the war the Western Conference resumed its activities as an active missionary body. It established many new churches in Illinois in this period. But though there was increasing unity and efficient organization, theological differences which reflected disputes in the East began to divide the Conference. The Western Conference was traditionally opposed to

How many?

---

[1]E. L. Bogart and C. M. Thompson, "The Industrial State," Vol. IV of Centennial History of Illinois, op. cit., p. 1.

[2]Cooke, op. cit., p. 176.

[3]Ibid., p. 184.

exclusiveness. Throughout this period it objected to division. To understand the tensions within it and the anti-dogmatic resolutions it adopted one must understand the divisions within the main Unitarian body and in the East.

The energy the entire Unitarian body had thrown into the Civil War made Unitarians enthusiastic and eager for a better organized and more influential denomination. The first session of the National Convention met in New York in 1865. "For the first time in the history of the Unitarian body in this country the churches were directly represented at a general gathering. The number of churches represented was 282, and they sent 385 delegates."[1] Though the organizational convention formed the National Conference of Unitarian Churches it also laid the ground work for division. The conference refused to adopt any creed, but the preamble to its constitution called the delegates "'disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ,' while the first article declared that the conference was organized to promote 'the cause of Christian faith and work.' It was quite evident that a large majority of the delegates regarded the convention as Christian in its purposes and distinctly Unitarian in its denominational mission."[2] The more radical section of the conference was dissatisfied. The radicals took the battle for a broader base of organization to the first session of the National Conference at Syracuse in 1866. Meanwhile, the issue had been vigorously discussed in the pulpit, in pamphlets, and in denominational periodicals.[3] The first day of the convention the liberals tried to get a resolution for broader definition of the mission of the conference accepted.

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 190-191.

[2] Ibid., p. 191.

[3] Ibid., p. 201.

Included in the resolution was a proposal to change its name to "The National Conference of Unitarian and Independent Churches." The conference did not agree but did change its name to The National Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches. A resolution to add a clause defining the meaning of the name to explain that it was "not meant to exclude religious societies which have no distinct church organization, and are not nominally Christian, if they desire to cooperate with the conference in what it regards as Christian work,"[1] in other words "we don't mean it literally," failed to pass. This failure of the radicals to achieve a victory at Syracuse lead to the formation of the Free Religious Association. While not distinctly Unitarian it included many Unitarians, some of whom were active ministers.

This situation lead to warfare of various degrees. The "Year Book controversy" broke out. At their request the names of a number of radical ministers had been dropped from the Year Book. An inquiry was made of the other ministers of the Free Religious Association as to whether they wanted their names dropped also. Rev. William J. Potter of New Bedford, secretary of the Free Religious Association, replied to the inquiry by saying that he was willing to have his name remain in the Year Book as he still considered himself a Unitarian, but he also wanted it clearly understood that this did not mean that he wished to be called a Christian. The directors of the American Unitarian Association thereupon instructed the editor of the Year Book to drop Mr. Potter's name along with those of the other radical ministers. A truly Unitarian furor over this "dogmatism" followed. Mr. Potter's church indignantly withdrew from the American Unitarian Association. The Western Unitarian Conference in 1875 passed vigorous

---

[1] Ibid., p. 202.

resolutions against the action and proceeded to adopt as its basis of union the following statement: "That the Western Unitarian Conference conditions its fellowship on no dogmatic tests, but welcomes all thereto who desire to work with it in advancing the kingdom of God."[1] Thus the Conference went on record as condemning the exclusion of the radicals. Throughout this period the Western Conference was persistent in its insistence on a broader base for fellowship. Its membership included both the radicals and conservatives, but the radicals came to be a definite majority, as is shown by the vote in 1866.[2]

The theological development of this period was towards a less Christocentric and Bibliocentric position. The so-called radical position, which characterized the Free Religious Association, became strong in the West. This position is well described as Universal Ethical Theism. Those who held this position rejected the Bible as a detailed revelation of God and considered it an inspiring product of man rather than an inspired work of God.[3] They rejected the miracles of Jesus as fictions and regarded Jesus as a great spiritual teacher and leader rather than a messenger sent by God. They did not believe in the resurrection, the virgin birth, and the like, and replaced these beliefs with a concern for the message of Jesus as a great teacher and a respect for him as one of the greatest if not <u>the</u> greatest of the prophetic figures who have arisen among all peoples. The idea of the Church Universal was carried to its ultimate extent, and it was held that all men are part of the great church of God and

---

[1] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 209.

[2] See <u>infra</u>, p. 32.

[3] The following description of the theology of Ethical Theism is based upon Cooke, <u>op. cit</u>., pp. 220-221.

light from God has come in varying degrees to every race and nation. On this basis Ethical Theists opposed exclusiveness and were willing to accept into fellowship persons who were not avowedly Christian. This position "means, in simple statement, that religion is natural to man, and that it needs no authentication by miracle or supernatural manifestation. It means that all religions are essentially the same in their origin, and that none can claim the special favor of God in their manner of presentation to the world."[1] Universal Ethical Theism became increasingly strong in the West. Outstanding ministers of the West, such as Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Frederick L. Hosmer, and James Vila Blake, all of whom served churches in Illinois, were leaders of the movement. Ethical Theism developed through these and other men, a creativity in liturgical literature, particularly hymn writing. An outstanding production of this group was Unity Hymns and Chorales[2] which gave expression to their position in liturgical form. Many of the most famous hymns produced by Unitarians were written by men of this school of thought.

Churches were started in this period by missionaries, by local revolts against orthodox Christianity, and by established churches organizing new churches in the same city or nearby localities. As soon as the Civil War ended, the Western Conference began to found new churches. A second church, Unity Church, had been started in Chicago before the war. A third church had been projected at that time, and it was finally organized in 1868. A fourth church followed in 1869. Attempts to organize churches were made at Evanston, Hinsdale, and Winnetka. Hinsdale became

---

[1] Ibid., p. 221.

[2] W. C. Gannett, J. V. Blake, and F. L. Hosmer, eds., Unity Hymns and Chorales, Chicago, "Unity," 1884.

successfully established but Evanston was a failure. (The present Evanston church dates from a later period.) The Winnetka church lasted for eighteen years, but it had a settled ministry for not more than five years of this time. In addition to these churches, which were organized from Chicago, a church was organized at Roscoe near Rockford. No history is available of this church.

New churches arose spontaneously in opposition to Congregational orthodoxy. This was true of Geneseo[1] and Sheffield.[2] A church was started at Moline but soon collapsed. Presumably it was upon the same basis as the present Moline church organized in 1886, which was in opposition to "the orthodoxy of the Congregational church up on the hill."[3]

The missionary, like Conant in the last period, who covered thousands of miles of territory and organized churches scattered over a third of the state, had disappeared in Illinois by this period. The only instance of missionary activity was the mission of Jasper Douthit in Shelby county and vicinity. He was a native of Shelby County who became interested in Unitarianism through his reading, attended Meadville Theological School, and, after a period of three months as minister of the Unitarian church at Princeton, returned to convert his own people. His labors in Shelby County as a Unitarian minister began in 1867. He founded a church in Shelbyville in 1876. He already had organized a congregation in the country which was known as Jordan Unitarian Church (officially admitted in 1882 to the A. U. A. but in existence long before this.) He also organized a church in Mattoon,

---

[1]Eliza Shaw Stamm, "The Unitarian Church," Geneseo Centennial History, Historical Committee of the Geneseo Centennial Association, Geneseo, Illinois, 1936, pp. 43-46.

[2]Taxpayers & Voters of Bureau County, Illinois, op. cit., p. 143.

[3]Mrs. Dufva, Personal interview.

just outside Shelby County, in 1877. Douthit's work was supported by the A. U. A. and the Western Conference. He built up a considerable following but was unable to develop a self-supporting church. His churches continued through this and the following period. Except for two years when Mattoon had a settled minister, all his churches remained under his ministry.

SEE W. W. ROBBINS, THESIS DOUTHIT - M.T.S. THESIS

In addition to the churches listed the Western Conference attempted to revive two dormant churches: Tremont and Lockport. Princeton had been started before the war but had been inactive during it. It was revived in 1866. A church was founded at Jacksonville. This may actually have been a revival for a church existed here around 1838,[1] and some continuing influence may have remained. When the church at Tremont failed to respond, an attempt, which was also a failure, was made at nearby Delevan. There was a two year period of cooperation with the Universalists at Ottawa.[2]

The organization of churches in this period is then characterized by an expansion from established Unitarian centers to new localities.

There were many church deaths during the period, for many of the attempts to organize or reorganize churches were failures. Delevan, Evanston, Jacksonville, Moline, Ottawa, Roscoe, and Winnetka existed as active Unitarian churches for periods of from one to ten years. Princeton, Lockport, and Tremont were dead or virtually dead, despite attempts to revive them, by the end of the period. All the churches which had been in existence as active churches at the end of the preceding period continued to

---

[1]Cooke, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

[2]Western Conference Minutes, op. cit., 1870-1880, is the source of information about these churches.

survive. The church at Rockford, however, became inactive, but it survived as an independent liberal church since most of its congregation was absorbed by the newly formed Church of the Christian Union. This church finally became Unitarian in name as well as in fact in 1928.[1]

At the end of the period the seven active churches of the preceding period were augmented by seven additional active churches: Third and Fourth churches in Chicago, Geneseo, Hinsdale, Sheffield, and Jasper Douthit's three churches, Shelbyville, Jordan church near Shelbyville, and Mattoon. It should be noted that the latter three were served by one minister. Sheffield shared a minister with Buda where Chester Covel, a liberal Christian, had settled in 1858. (Fourth Church was not active as the period closed, but as it was almost immediately revived by Jenkin Lloyd Jones as All Souls Church, it is included among the active churches.)

The new churches of this period were not as successful in becoming successful institutions as those of the previous period: of the seven churches, only two exist today as active churches with full time ministers. Shelbyville has a student minister, Geneseo is inactive, Fourth Church, Jordan Church, and Mattoon have died. Third Church in Chicago and Hinsdale are active. This is in decided contrast to the preceding period, for all seven churches which were active at the beginning of the Civil War still exist, and only one, Geneva, is without a full time minister.

The period from 1880 to 1900 was a period of controversy and schism. The industrial development of the preceding period continued. America became an industrial giant. "Big business"

---

[1]Harold Shelley, Personal interview.

developed and gave birth to the system of trusts. The great urban center became dominant in American politics; in Illinois this was particularly true of Chicago. Into the growing cities poured streams of immigrants from Europe.

The period was one of open theological warfare. During the controversies of the preceding period the Western Conference had maintained its unity, but by 1880 the theological tensions between the Ethical Theists and the Christian Theists had reached a breaking point. When the Western Conference incorporated in 1882, there was some dispute as to the statement of purpose. The statement finally adopted was satisfactory to both sides. The official seal, however, contained the words: "Freedom, Fellowship, and Character in Religion."[1] Except for the word "character" this was the motto of the Free Religious Association. William Channing Gannett, a director of the Free Religious Association, suggested that the inscription on the seal be made part of the constitution of the Western Conference. Jabez Sunderland objected that this phrase had merely ethical connotation while Unitarianism was part of a definite religious tradition. Another battle over preambles now began. As the controversy became heated, Jenkin Lloyd Jones took the side of Gannett in Unity, which carried the words, "For Freedom, Fellowship, and Character in Religion" on its masthead. Meanwhile Jasper Douthit of Shelbyville had become alarmed. He published a paper, Our Best Words, as part of his missionary work, and he now began to publish an "Extra" devoted solely to the controversy with each issue of the paper.

In 1884 Jones resigned as secretary of the Conference and

---

[1]The following discussion of the Western Issue is based upon Crompton, op. cit., Chapter VI, pp. 68-75.

Sunderland succeeded him. He and Brooke Hereford, minister of First Church of Chicago, established The Unitarian to compete with Unity. In his first report to the Conference in 1885 Sunderland demanded that the conference continue only on a basis of belief in Christianity, God, and worship in addition to ethical concepts. He demanded that only mihisters who would agree to these standards be recommended to churches. After considerable opposition his terms were accepted, and he remained as secretary. In 1886 the Western Conference met at Cincinnati. Just before the sessions began Sunderland published a pamphlet, The Issue in the West, which declared the issue to be whether or not Unitarianism was to remain primarily a religious movement. The debate at the conference developed into a battle. A resolution presented by William Channing Gannett stating that "the Western Unitarian Conference conditions its fellowship to no dogmatic tests, but welcomes all who wish to join it to establish truth, righteousness, and love in the world,"[1] was passed. The conference now split. The conservative churches withdrew and formed the Western Unitarian Association. In Illinois the seceding churches were those of Jasper Douthit and First Church (known at this time as the Church of the Messiah) in Chicago and Unity Church in Chicago. The breach remained unhealed, and the A. U. A. established its own missionary agent for the West in 1891. In 1892 some of the schismatics attended the sessions of the Western Conference. Finally the National Conference, in which all parties to the dispute were still represented, adopted a new preamble. It read:

> The Conference of Unitarian and Other Christian Churches was formed in the year 1865, with the purpose of strengthening the churches and societies which should unite in it for

---

[1] Ibid., p. 71.

> more and better work for the Kingdom of God. These churches accept the religion of Jesus, holding in accordance with his teaching, that practical religion is summed up in Love to God and Love to Man.
>
> The Conference recognizes the fact that its constituency is Congregational in tradition and policy. Therefore, it declares that nothing in this constitution is to be construed as an authoritative test; and we cordially invite to our working fellowship any who while differing from us in belief, are in general sympathy with our spirit and practical aims.[1]

This compromise formula was accepted by both sides. The Western Conference reunited and the schism was healed.

The theology of this period was characterized by the increasing acceptance of Universal Ethical Theism. The increasing influence of this position was shown by the division during the Western Issue. Only the two Chicago churches and Douthit's churches withdrew from the Western Conference. This means, at least, that the other churches felt that it was no longer absolutely necessary to insist upon a Christian basis for Unitarianism. While it may well be that ministers and churches which were not actively Ethical Theist remained within the conference, they must have considered the position compatible with Unitarianism. All Souls Church was of course closely identified with the Western Conference as Jones was both minister of the church and leader of the Ethical Theist group. The church at Quincy was identified with the Western Conference. "During the pastorate of Mr. Blake this church became very closely identified with the Western Conference, whose attitude towards statements of faith was decidedly more inclusive than that prevailing in the body at large," and the church also accepted a covenant drawn up by Blake which is a clear statement of Universal Ethical Theism.[2] Bloomington, Alton,

---

[1] Christian Register, Vol. LXXIII, No. 40, October 4, 1894, p. 625.

[2] Montgomery, op. cit., p. 10.

and Third Church were in substantial agreement with the position of the Western Conference.

A particular aspect of the theology of this period was the acceptance of evolution. The Ethical Theists and the Christocentric Unitarians both accepted the theory and gave it a religious interpretation. Particularly prominent in this aspect of Unitarian theology was Minot J. Savage, who was influential in developing an appreciation of the religious values of the evolutionary hypothesis.[1]

The controversy and schism of this period retarded growth, and the organization of new churches was sporadic. The Western Conference organized churches at Monmouth, Streator, and Moline. At Moline a group within the Congregational church who objected to its orthodoxy formed the nucleus of the movement which was organized by the minister from Davenport, Iowa, Arthur M. Judy.[2] One new church, Evanston, was organized from Third Church by the movement of Unitarians into that developing suburb.

This period saw the first appearance of two types of churches which were to be prominent in the following periods. Buda joined the Unitarian denomination after having existed as a Christian Church. Its minister had long had close association with the Unitarians, and he had once served as minister of the Unitarian church at Sheffield. The other type of church to make its appearance in this period was the independent church. An independent church is organized by an individual minister who feels that the Unitarian denomination is cut off from reaching some

---

[1]Cf. his The Passing and the Permanent in Religion, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1901, and Evolution and Religion, C. H. Buchanan and Company, Philadelphia, 1886.

[2]Mrs. Frank Dufva, nee Alberta Crampton, a charter member of the church, Personal interview, 1945.

group in society which he would like to reach. Such churches are "one man" organizations. In Illinois these churches have been directed towards either persons who would be repelled by the Unitarian denominational label or towards immigrant groups which would not feel at home in the usual Unitarian church. The connection with the Unitarian denomination is slight. Sometimes this slight connection is deliberate; at other times it is necessary as in the case of an immigrant group church whose members do not speak English. The nature of an independent church may be summed up by saying that its minister and members are not in full fellowship--at least psychologically--with other Unitarians. In this period two independent churches were founded. A "People's Temple" was founded in Chicago and listed in the Year Book for one year. Seward Baker organized a "People's Church" in Sterling and remained there from 1895 to 1898.

Few churches died in this period, though most of those founded in this period did not last until the next. Both of the individualistic churches, Peoples Temple and the church in Sterling collapsed. The attempt to start a church at Monmouth was a failure. It was inactive by the end of the period. The church at Jacksonville and the one at Winnetka, which had been dormant, disappeared. The end of the period found Mattoon inactive; however, it was revived briefly in the next period. (A church in Sororo is listed for one year during this period. There is no information available on this church.) The church at Rockford officially died during this period.

The end of this period found all the churches which had been active at the beginning of the period still in existence though Mattoon was now inactive. To these churches were added four new churches which survived the period: Buda, Evanston,

Moline, and Streator. It is to be noted that this is a smaller number of surviving churches than in the preceding periods. Of these only one, Evanston, survives today as an active church. One other, Moline, is inactive. The other two are dead.

The period from the turn of the century through the first World War, or from 1900 to 1920 was a period of decline. The decline was in many cases concealed and did not reach its climax until the following period. Nationally this was the time of American over-optimism and imperialistic dreams. The Spanish American War lead to talk of "The American Empire." America was now a world power. With this growth of external power the growth of internal prosperity in the form of increasing industrialization, brought its problems. The development of trusts and other monopolies was an economic problem of the first magnitude. Immigration to America was slowing down, largely as a result of restrictive legislation, but the foreign born were now a part of American life both as a creative force and a problem.

The period was characterized by little theological tension, but there was some disagreement as to the place of the church in society. The Western Issue having been settled, Unitarians tried to avoid open theological conflict. The liberals had generally won the day in Illinois and throughout the West, and there was not much occasion for theological dispute. The Protestant churches in general began to admire the "efficiency" of "big business."[1] This admiration produced a reaction in the form of the Social Gospel. Those who advocated the Social Gospel, lead by Walter Rauschenbush, protested and demanded that Christianity ally itself with the working man. As this tension was

---

[1]William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America, Harper and Brothers, 1930, Chapter XXI, pp. 495 ff.

social rather than theological it was easily imported into the Unitarian Church. Unitarians were affected by it. Another tension in the churches during this period was occasioned by the First World War. Formerly pacifism had largely been confined to the historic "peace churches," such as the Quakers and Mennonites.[1] Now it reached into all Protestant denominations. The Unitarians produced their pacifists along with the rest.

The theology of this period quietly came to terms with the findings of science and philosophy. On the whole this period is decidedly less creative theologically than the preceding periods. There was a marked decline in the amount and quality of hymn writing, as is demonstrated by the lack of hymns written in this period in the present Unitarian hymnal, Hymns of the Spirit.

There is a noticeable change in the attitudes of Unitarians towards Unitarianism. For example, on the occasion of its seventy-fifth anniversary, the American Unitarian Association published a history of Unitarianism in America by G. W. Cooke.[2] In the closing chapter, entitled "The Future of Unitarianism," the author says that "a chief value of Unitarianism in the past has been that it had pioneered the way for the development of the modern spirit within the limits of Christianity." He goes on to speak of the growing liberalism in other denominations. He then declares that the promise of Unitarianism is in the cultivation of a deeper spiritual life. "Its mission is one of philanthropy, charity, and altruism." He looks for no large growth in the constituency of Unitarianism for he feels that Unitarianism is too individualistic and has too little tradition to reach persons outside of New England and localities where New England traditions

---

[1] Ibid.,

[2] Cooke, op. cit.

have been carried. He holds that the promise of Unitarianism "is not to be found in the rapid multiplication of its churches or in its devotion to propagandist aims, but in its loyalty to the free spirit and in its exemplification of the worth and beauty of the religion of humanity." Throughout the whole discussion in this chapter there is a definite acceptance of the Unitarian church as a small group confined to persons of New England background, whose major mission for the future is to give an example to the liberals within the orthodox Christian churches.[1] This attitude is quite different from the earlier Mid-western Unitarians who felt a strong missionary zeal to bring the benefits of rational religion to everyone. How widespread this attitude was in the Middle West and in Illinois is difficult to say. From the actions of Unitarians in this period, particularly their failure to start new churches, it seems to have been rather widespread.

This period represents a low point in the founding of new churches. Almost all the new churches were the result of individualistic attempts to found churches and, even including these, the total number of attempts was the lowest of any period. A "Peoples Church" was carried on in Aurora for four years, beginning in 1906. A Swedish Unitarian church in Chicago lasted from 1904 until 1914. The only other church organized during this period was one at Urbana. This church was organized on the campus of the University of Illinois as part of the program to establish churches at college centers.[2] It has survived but has neither developed a large membership nor has it become economically self-sufficiant. A church at Serena entered the denomination in 1904 and remained until 1918 with irregular pulpit sup-

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 436-443.

[2] Cooke, op. cit., pp. 214-215, discusses "College Town Missions."

plies. Whether it died or merely left the denomination, its Unitarian connection terminated at that date.

Not only was this a period in which few churches were founded, it was a period in which existing churches declined and died. A brief attempt, 1902-1904, was made to revive Mattoon and to install a new minister at Shelbyville, but it failed. Buda, Sheffield, Jordan Church at Shelbyville, and Streator became inactive. Although they were not officially removed from the Year Book until the next period, they were in fact dead. Geneva, Moline, and Shelbyville became inactive but were revived in the next period. Other churches which did not become inactive declined in strength. Beginning from the time the church moved to Lincoln Center in 1900 All Souls Church declined, and by the end of the period was in a dangerous condition.[1] It died early in the next period. Geneseo began to decline toward the end of this period. It was some time before the decline became evident partly because the church was endowed and could still obtain ministers.[2]

Those churches which did not die or become so weakened that they died in the next period suffered severe declines. By the end of the period some of them were all but dead. One piece of evidence which substantiates the decline can be found in the comparison of the number of adherents given by each church in 1903 and the number of constituents given in 1920. The two figures are comparable although adherents were calculated on a more extensive basis than constituents. In almost every case the 1920

---

[1]Based upon conversations of the author with Curtis Reese, Dean of Abraham Lincoln Center and President of the Western Unitarian Conference.

[2]Year Book, op. cit., and interview with a member of the church (whose name is withheld by request).

figures are substantial reductions over the figures of 1903.

At the end of this period, of the seventeen active churches and one inactive church which had existed at the beginning of the period, eleven churches were still active, two were dead, and five were inactive. Only one new church, Urbana, had been added. For the first time in its history Illinois Unitarianism had fewer active churches at the end of a period than at the beginning. Even of the active churches three were so weakened that they collapsed during the next period: All Souls died and Geneseo and Moline became inactive. It is no exaggeration to say that there was no really strong church in the state.

The period of revival was a period of national and international turmoil, from 1920 to 1944. Two world wars twenty years apart disturbed the national and international scene. The great depression of 1929 brought long smouldering domestic problems to a crisis. The eruption of these problems brought a consciousness that all was not well with the world, and this consciousness brought a flood of proposed remedies, from Communism to Neo-orthodoxy. To Unitarians the major theological tension within this period was the Theist-Humanist controversy. When Humanism developed after the First World War, it soon reached into the Unitarian denomination. The Humanists frankly declared that the idea of God was not necessary to religion and proposed to develop a Unitarianism without reference to God and organized solely on the basis of human values.[1] As even the broadest definitions of Unitarianism up to this time had been theistic, there were objections to Humanists, particularly as ministers, on the ground that they had gone beyond the limits of religion. These objectors

---

[1]Edwin A. Burtt, Types of Religious Philosophy, Harper and Bros., New York, 1939, pp. 352 ff.

felt that the Humanists wanted to convert Unitarianism into a purely secular philosophy. This charge is similar to that leveled against the Ethical Theists of the preceding periods.

This conflict failed to produce open schism or large scale withdrawal from the denomination. The Humanists followed the example of Parker in announcing that they would leave only if ordered to do so. As time went on and the number of ministers who were Humanists increased, particularly in the Western Conference, the conflict declined.[1] A modified theism, an outgrowth of the older Ethical Theism with its transcendental philosophy replaced by newer philosophical conceptions became popular. The distance between this new Theism and Humanism came to be regarded on both sides as a difference of opinion and not an insuperable barrier. As the period drew to a close, the arguments between the Theists and the Humanists became of minor importance compared to the argument which found Humanists and non-Christocentric Theists opposed to Christocentric Theists.[2] The present theological tension within Unitarianism resembles the Western Issue repeated in a slightly different setting.

The theology of this period was characterized by the development of Humanism, Naturalistic Theism, and an increasing interest in the distinctive character of Unitarianism.

Humanism has been a development of the Twentieth Century though there have been anticipations of it in previous philosophy.[3] Probably the simplest way of stating the Humanist position is to list its assumptions which are disputed by other schools of

---

[1]Curtis Reese, Personal interview.

[2]George H. Williams, "Current Trends in Unitarian Theology," The Christian Register, Vol. 124, No. 2, February, 1945, pp. 41-44.

[3]Burtt, op. cit., p. 350.

thought. A good statement by an impartial observer of philosophical competence is that of Edwin A. Burtt[1] under the title of "The Major Disputed Assumptions of Humanism":

> "1. Assumptions Concerning Man's Moral Situation
>
> > "a. Moral values are relative to man's changing experience.
> > "b. The sharable social values, however, maintain and enhance their excellence in the face of all doubt and criticism.
> > "c. Man needs not only the satisfaction of particular wants but also the attainment of an integrated personality.
> > "d. This attainment is best secured by earnest devotion to the sharable social goods.
> > "e. Such devotion is the essence of religion.
>
> "2. Metaphysical Assumptions
>
> > "a. Science is the only dependable guide to truth about the world.
> > "b. The universe is an objective order, which takes no account of man's good or ill except so far as he controls parts of it toward his ends.
> > "c. There is no guarantee of the ultimate victory of good, nor of the eternal preservation of human values.
> > "d. Intelligent devotion to the highest values does not require such a guarantee. The ultimate faith of religion is faith in the worth-whileness of human good.
>
> "3. Assumptions Concerning Social Ethics
>
> > "a. The most important values which maintain their excellence are scientific truth, artistic creation, and love.
> > "b. The joy of comradeship in the quest for these values is a more than adequate compensation for faith in a superhuman helper.
> > "c. All social institutions must be progressively but determinedly transformed until they express and give full scope to these values."[2]

Humanism in this sense became very influential in the Western Conference among laity and clergy alike.[3] The churches in Illinois

---

[1]The Unitarian statement of this position is given in A Humanist Manifesto. This was prepared by a group which included a number of Unitarian ministers. A copy is included in Appendix 2.

[2]Burtt, op. cit., p. 350.

[3]Frederick M. Eliot, Chairman, Unitarians Face a New Age, the report of the Commission of Appraisal to the American Unitarian Association, Boston, 1936. The chapter entitled "Personal Religious Values of Unitarians," pp. 41-72, discusses the values

exemplify this trend.

As Humanism was a new idea, its development is easier to trace than that of Unitarian Theism, which had already developed non-traditional concepts of God. Theism took account of the newly developed philosophies, such as that of Alfred N. Whitehead. Many Theists began to call themselves Naturalistic Theists to distinguish their ideas from the older ones of a transcendant deity. According to Burtt, "The contemporary trend in religious thought referred to as 'Naturalistic Theism' is a reaction against Humanism but not against Modernism."[1] This is not entirely true of Naturalistic Theism within the Unitarian denomination, for many of the Naturalistic Theists oppose the limitation of Unitarianism to the Christian Modernism. According to the definitions used by Burtt many of the Unitarian Theists would be classified as Theistic Humanists. That is to say, as persons who accept the postulates of Humanism set forth above but who hold that the term "God" can appropriately be redefined "to mean the twofold interaction of man with his environing universe through which commanding ideals emerge and guide action towards their realization,"[2] or some similar definition.

A major interest among Mid-western Unitarians has been the relationship of Unitarianism to Christianity and the mission of Unitarianism in the future. The Western Unitarian Conference has gone on record as endorsing the principle that Unitarianism should not be limited to Christianity but should try to become a world uniting faith embodying the great principles from all religions. A resolution setting forth these principles written by Curtis

---

held by Unitarians and declares that the Western Unitarians are more Humanistic in their attitudes than the body at large.

[1] Burtt, op. cit., p. 442.

[2] Ibid., p. 405.

Reese, President of the conference, was adopted in Detroit in 1944.[1]

The revival of interest in Unitarianism was accompanied in Illinois by the absorption of independent liberal churches, the method of expansion characteristic of this period. One attempt was made to start an individualistic independent church in Chicago, the Church of the Brotherhood (1932-1938), but this failed.[2] When Curtis Reese became Western Conference Secretary in 1919, he attempted to maintain the established churches, most of which were in a deplorable condition, and to persuade independent religious groups to join the Unitarian denomination. He was unsuccessful in persuading the Independent Religious Society of Chicago to become a permanent part of the Unitarian denomination. However, the Church of the Christian Union of Rockford, which was Unitarian in background, and Peoples Church of Chicago became members. Later the Peoples Liberal Church of Chicago also joined the denomination. In 1942 the Beverly Unitarian Fellowship of Chicago was organized. This is the first denominational attempt to start a new church in Illinois since 1909. At this writing (1945) it gives promise of becoming successfully established.

A large number of churches died during this period as a result of trends which had started in the preceding period. Buda, Sheffield, Jordan Church at Shelbyville, and Streator died officially, although they were virtually dead when the period began. The process of decline which had begun in the previous period

---

[1] The Christian Register, Vol. 123, No. 7, July, 1944, p. 270. For the original statement cf. Unity, Vol. CXXX, No. 3, May, 1944, p. 35.

[2] Curtis Reese, Personal interview. O. E. Helsing, minister of the church throughout its existence, organized the church on his own initiative to work among the Scandinavians. The denomination did not approve of his activities and refused to give him aid. He may have received some aid which was given by the denomination in an effort to be fair.

killed All Souls of Chicago and reduced Geneseo to a feeble and inactive remnant. Moline was revived for a while but became inactive again except for occasional services. Shelbyville survives in a feeble condition with student ministers. Geneva has been revived with a small congregation (29 members in 1945) with a Meadville professor as minister, who conducts monthly services.

The other churches in Illinois continue to exist as active congregations. With the possible exception of Unity Church of Chicago they are all stronger than when the period began. All have had a revival sometime during the period. With the exception of Unity Church, this revival has been followed by increasing membership, sounder financial condition, and reinforced morale. Some of the churches were saved from the brink of disaster. This is the case with Alton,[1] Quincy, Third Church in Chicago,[2] First Church in Chicago,[3] and Evanston.[4]

As the period ends one of the churches which was active at the beginning of the period, All Souls, has died, and one, Geneseo, is inactive. Of the three churches which were inactive but not in actuality dead at the beginning of the period, one is now inactive and two are operating with non-resident ministers. (Moline, Geneva, and Shelbyville.) Of the eleven active churches which existed at the beginning of the period nine remain active and all but one of these are stronger than at the beginning of the period. To them has been added the independent church at Rockford and two formerly independent churches in Chicago, Peoples

---

[1]Rev. Wallace W. Robbins, Former minister at Alton, Personal interview.

[2]Curtis Reese, Personal interview.

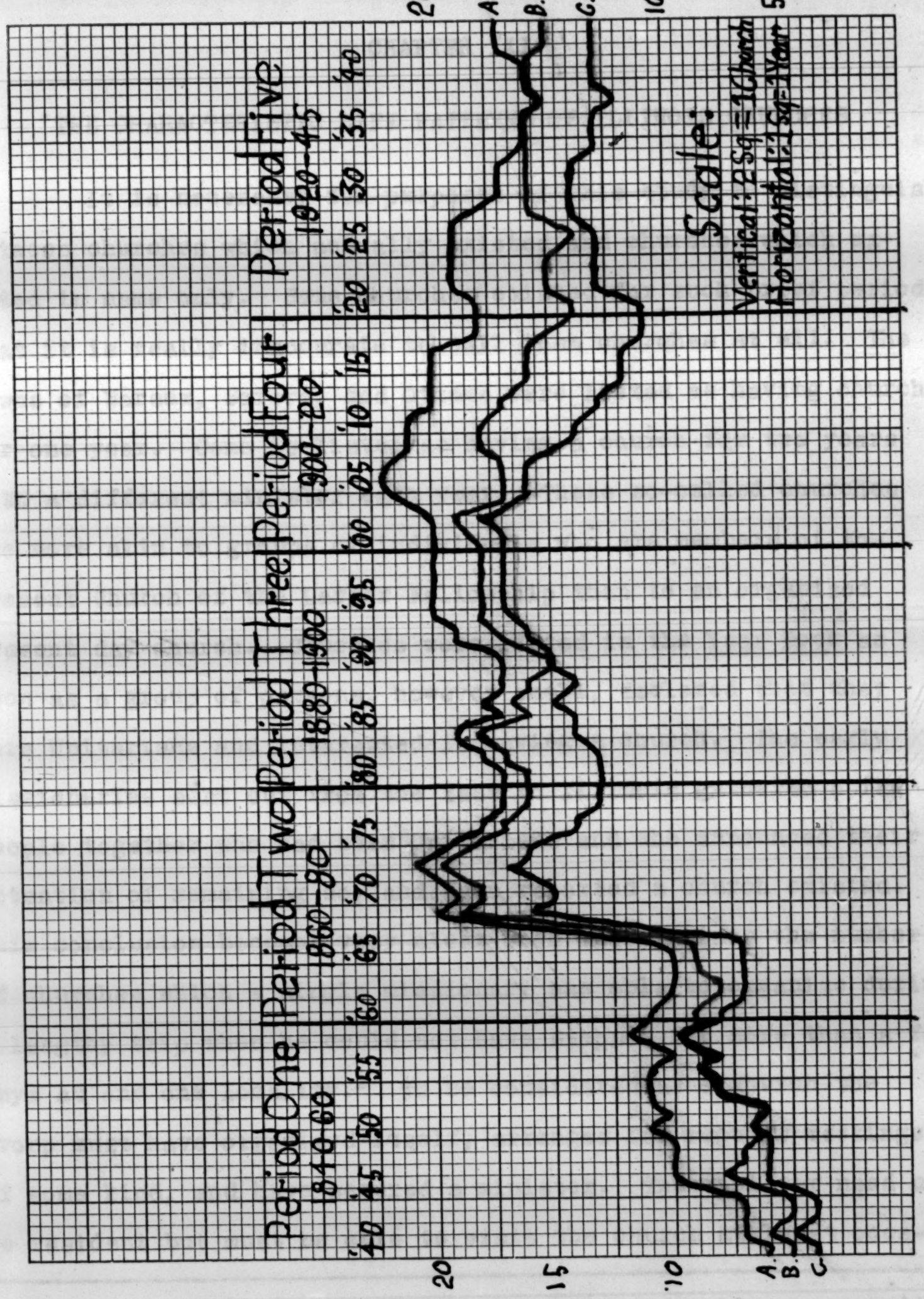
[3]Year Book of the A. U. A., op. cit. Cf. statistics, 1918-1930.

[4]Curtis Reese, Personal interview.

and Peoples Liberal. One new church has been started, Beverly in Chicago. The end of the period finds thirteen active churches with full time ministers, two active churches without settled ministers, and two inactive churches. This is in contrast to eleven active and three inactive churches at the beginning of the period. All Souls was the only church that died during the period.

Unitarianism in Illinois is thus stronger than it was in the preceding period. The number of churches which are active exceeds any period except the one ending in 1900. The increase of this last period, it should be noted, has not resulted in the planting of Unitarian churches in new localities. With the exception of Rockford, which had definite connections with Unitarianism in the past, all of the new churches are in Chicago.

GRAPH I
The Total Number of Churches by Periods




Note: Line A represents the total number of churches, line B represents both active and semi-active churches, line C represents those churches which are active.

## CHAPTER III

## THE CHARACTERISTIC LIFE PATTERNS OF ILLINOIS CHURCHES

It is necessary for purposes of this study to distinguish between churches which actually existed and churches which existed in name only. Some churches existed for such brief periods that it is really inaccurate to call them churches at all. The towns of Warsaw, Sororo, and Ottawa were listed as having churches for one year. Como is listed as having a church for two years with a different minister each year. These so-called churches are more akin to groups of individuals who are members of the present Church of the Larger Fellowship than to an organized present day church. Churches were listed in the Year Book as soon as a group of persons, however small, declared that they were Unitarians and interested in having a church. The early missionaries sent out from the East to Illinois gathered a few people together who had been Unitarians and who announced their intention of remaining so, and then reported a church existed. This conclusion becomes very clear when one examines the number of churches which a single missionary was able to organize during a lengthy trip when he could not have stopped for more than a few days at any one locality.[1] To be considered as a church the group must have organized itself, arranged for regular meetings of some kind, and have secured a minister. The minister need not be resident but must be able to visit the church at least occa-

---

[1]Cf. Cooke, op. cit., pp. 150-151, and Collyer, op. cit., pp. 100-110.

sionally and maintain contact during his absences. On this basis the author has excluded churches at Como, Ottawa, Warsaw, and Peoples Temple and the Independent Religious Society in Chicago. (The last is a special case where an independent church was being worked into the denomination. As it was actually affiliated for only one year, it is also excluded as never having really been a Unitarian church.) The church at Sororo has also been excluded as it was listed for only one year. Furthermore, unlike every locality reported in the Year Book from Illinois, it no longer survives even as a place name.[1] Marseilles is listed without a minister in the first issue of the Year Book. As there is no information whatsoever available about it and as it is completely impossible to say how long it existed, it has been dropped from consideration. Masaryk Memorial Center in Chicago was listed in the Year Book as a church but was supposed to be a social settlement to commemorate the memory of Thomas Masaryk, the first president of Czechoslovakia. In view of the disagreement over its function it is not considered as a church in this classification. Beverly is also not counted in this classification because of its recent origin. These exclusions leave a list of forty-one churches. This list is the basis for the statistics in the classification below. It should further be noted that the length of the churches' lives in the following discussion refers to their active lives. After a church ceases to be active, it is considered dead. Exceptions are made where there is a revival after a short while or where there is some other indication that active church life continued. The periods discussed in the following section refer to the time that the church was active, that is, had reason-

---

[1]The Rand McNally Company Map of Illinois which lists in its index "every inhabited locality" fails to list Sororo as does the Encyclopedia Brittanica Atlas.

ably regular services and had a minister who was resident or preached regularly. This excludes the existence of churches as preaching stations. Near Chicago, where there is a supply of preachers available, churches can hold services for long periods of time with little local activity or financial support. As long as the good will of some ministers can be prevailed upon, the church can continue. Such existence is not considered active life, for it is a kind of artificial preservation of what would otherwise be a dead institution. This is the case at Winnetka and Lockport. In other words when the thesis says that a particular church lasted for ten years, it may have been in the Year Book for a longer period. The ten year period refers to the time in which a minister, resident or non-resident, conducted services and the church in its reports to the Western Conference is shown to be active. The records of the Western Conference rather than the Year Book have been followed.

About half (twenty-one out of forty) of the churches which were founded in Illinois never became established. It is necessary for the purposes of this paper to use "established" in a specialized sense. An established church is one which has developed an institutional life. The church exists as an entity apart from particular persons or a particular building or even apart from a particular minister. People are loyal to the church. This does not rule out an identification of the church with the minister so that it may be disrupted if the minister were to leave. It merely means that the church is more than a man preaching on Sunday morning or a particular group of laymen with whom the church is completely identified. In other words such a church is an institution in the sense of being "an established society or corporation," one which is something more than the people who

compose it at any particular time or the building which it may occupy on any particular occasion.

Churches are seldom established institutions unless they have existed for more than ten years. The Department of Church Extention now expects a church to require about ten years to become economically self-sufficient. An observation of a church which is newer than this shows that the members slowly break the identification of the church with the original members and the original minister. It is only as the original nucleus ceases to be the major portion of the church that the congregation begins to think of the church as an entity. It requires some time, also, for the community in which the church is located to socially define the church as an established institution.

It is impossible to examine in detail the first ten years of the existing Illinois churches, and it is impossible to examine at all the internal affairs of short lived churches which died many years ago. One piece of statistical evidence bears out the ten year limitation as a kind of threshold. On the basis of records a church which lasted ten years will last at least thirty-five. Every church in Illinois which has had an active life of ten years, except the church at Streator, has lasted for at least thirty-five. (Mattoon had the services of Jasper Douthit for a period of more than ten years. As the church called a settled minister, who left in two years and who had been sent there to build up the church,[1] it is listed as never having been active for more than ten years. Douthit's services for the church were of necessity so limited--he had two other churches and it was difficult to get from Mattoon to Shelbyville--that it can be con-

---

[1]Minutes of the Western Unitarian Conference, op. cit., p. 298.

sidered only a preaching station for most of its existence. The fact that we do not find churches which died after fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five years of active life is a statistical confirmation of the hypothesis that a church which has lasted for more than ten years has acquired a kind of permanence.

Even though a church becomes established, it may have established itself in such a manner as to insure future difficulties. The members of a church may have developed a sense that the church is independent of their presence but they may not have completely dissociated the existence of the church from the presence of a particular minister. If the founding minister remains over a long period, he may, in the minds of both the congregation and the public, have become identified with the church. When he leaves, the church may have considerable difficulty in bringing itself to accept anyone else as minister. There is loyalty to the institution and a desire that the church go on; on the other hand, it may be hard for the congregation to accept someone else as their minister.

This difficulty is further complicated if the minister retires at the end of his pastorate. In this case he sometimes remains in the community and suffers from the same identification of himself with the institution that affects the congregation. He may find it very difficult to accept a successor. A church which has existed for over ten years but which has had only one minister for a long period has developed an institutional life and become established. The congregation has sufficient interest in the church that they wish to continue it. On the other hand, there is a weakness in the established character of such churches, and their institutional strength is not as great as that of the church which has survived changes in its ministry.

These difficulties are illustrated in Illinois in several churches. Following the ministry of Robert Collier Unity Church had a series of short pastorates of from one to four years, which greatly decreased the strength of the church. Buda alternated between Covel and other ministers towards the end of his ministry. He was minister emeritus and then minister again. At Geneseo as Milton J. Miller became too old to be an active minister, he had a series of assistants, some of whom were actually the ministers of the church. He was not actively the minister, but he resisted becoming minister emeritus.[1] The most striking case is that of Jasper Douthit. Douthit was unable even to turn his church over to his own son. When he became too old to conduct the services of the church, the church simply became inactive. A similar situation existed at All Souls, where the people found it hard to accept the successor to Jones although other factors are also responsible for its decline.[2]

The churches in Illinois are divided for purposes of analysis into three groups: those churches which failed to become established, that is those which lasted less than ten years; those established churches which have died or become inactive, and those established churches which are still active. Of the forty-one churches herein considered, nineteen fall within the first group and one additional church is very similar, making approximately 50 per cent of the churches fall within this category. Eight churches, or approximately 20 per cent of the churches, fall into the second category. There are twelve completely active surviving churches which have existed long enough to be

---

[1]Conversation of the author with members of the Geneseo church.

[2]Conversation of the author with Curtis Reese.

established. This constitutes approximately 30 per cent of the total.

These groups are significant for several reasons. The established church has a life span of twenty-five years longer than the non-established. That the two groups should have such different life spans is a statistical verification of the accuracy of the division. The differentiation between the second and third groups is simply on the basis of existence or non-existence today as an active church, which is of course significant. Furthermore it will be shown that these churches are qualitatively as well as quantitatively different. Each group has its own distinctive characteristics. The variations are in accordance with the characteristics of the group: that is, the more a church differs qualitatively from the others in its group, the more its quantitative characteristics, such as length of life and present day strength, resembled the other groups.

Twenty of the forty-one churches which are considered in this section failed to become established. Nineteen died after less than ten years of active life, and one lasted for sixteen years. Such churches on the whole were founded by an individual rather than organized by a group. These churches fall into two general classes: those which were founded by missionaries and those which were founded as independent churches.

Eight churches fall into the first class. Belvidere, Elgin, Dixon, and Galena were organized by Augustus H. Conant. Conant preached at these localities on missionary tours, attracted a few followers, and organized them into a church. In some cases Conant continued as a non-resident minister after the church was organized; in other cases the church called a minister. In no case was the church able to establish itself. Lockport and

Princeton were founded by Ichabod Codding. Both of these churches closed after he left. The Western Conference made unsuccessful attempts to revive these churches. Tremont, Peoria, and Hillsboro were organized by missionaries from the East about 1838. After the Western Conference was organized, it made attempts to revive these three churches but without success. A missionary church was organized in the same manner at Jacksonville. Later the Western Conference organized a church here (1869). This church probably had some relation to the early missionary church, for the Western Conference made no attempt to organize churches in any other towns in this part of the state, and at this period the Western Conference did organize churches in most of the localities in which there had been previous missionary churches. When the attempt to reorganize the church at Tremont failed, the Western Conference made an attempt to organize a church at nearby Delavan, which also failed.[1]

Those short term churches which were not founded by missionaries were mostly individualistically organized attempts to found independent churches. Such was the case with the Swedish Unitarian Church and the Church of the Brotherhood, both in Chicago, the Peoples Church in Sterling, and the Peoples Church of Aurora.[2]

Besides the individualistically founded churches listed above, three other churches failed to become established. A church was organized at Roscoe near Rockford. There is no information available on this church so it too may have been a mission-

---

[1]Tremont is listed in all Year Books from 1846 to 1900. It was not active in any sense for most of this time. The church at Delavan made no permanent impression on the community.

[2]This conclusion is only probable in the case of Aurora as there are no definite records of this church and its purposes.

ary venture. As it never had a settled minister, it may have been maintained from Rockford. A church was organized in Winnetka. It started with a building and apparently not much else. It never was successful and remained a preaching station after the attempts to make it an organized church failed.[1] A church at Serena is included in this group. This church is a unique case, for it is the only small town union church in Illinois which affiliated with the Unitarians. There is no evidence that it was in any way Unitarian in character. During its entire stay in the denomination it had only supply preaching. At any rate it failed to become established as a Unitarian Church. A church was organized at Monmouth. This church was probably part of the movement to establish Unitarian churches in college centers. Monmouth College is located here, and the church was organized during the period when Unitarians were, as a denomination, making an effort to organize churches in college centers.[2]

Churches in this class were founded in two kinds of communities. The individualistic churches, with the exception of Sterling, were organized in cities; two in Chicago and one in Aurora. The urban centers developed their own churches without the aid of professional missionaries. The missionary churches were organized in communities which are today small towns. Even when the churches were organized, the communities in which they were located were smaller for their time than the localities which developed their own churches, and they were growing at a much slower rate. The latter characteristic is very noticeable. The major exception to this last criterion is Galena, which was a

---

[1]Western Conference Minutes, op. cit., 1867-1873, pp. 244-296.

[2]Cooke, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

boom mining town. Conant's church here failed to take foot at the height of the boom. Galena is now a small town.

In a few cases the localities in which the churches were founded have become medium sized communities but have not reached 25,000. Jacksonville now has a population of 19,844. It has not been a rapidly growing community and was not at the time that the church was founded. Mattoon, in which Jasper Douthit maintained a preaching station from 1868 to 1890, was a slightly larger community, growing from 9,622 to 13,552 during this period.

Two missionary churches were located in communities which have since become cities of over 30,000. Conant founded a church in Elgin, and missionaries from the East organized a church in Peoria. In Peoria the Unitarians were absorbed into the Universalist church.[1] Elgin died just before the Civil War, and a Universalist church was organized there just after the Civil War. In other words, in both cases where Unitarian churches failed to become established in communities which are now first or second class cities a Universalist church succeeded.

The other churches which failed to become established (those not organized by missionaries) were also in small communities. Roscoe was only a village of 706 people when the church was organized and is now actually smaller than it was then. Al-

---

[1]The church reported to the Western Conference in 1858 that its building was rented to the Presbyterians for the second year but that it hoped to pay its church debt, call a minister, and resume services in the near future. The same year D. M. Reed, the minister of the Universalist church, reported to the Western Conference the very friendly relations between the Universalists and the Unitarians. As the Unitarians were not having services, this implies that they were attending the Universalist church. There is no record that the "hopes" of the Peoria church were ever fulfilled. Therefore, its membership was probably permanently absorbed by the Universalist church. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that Reed considered himself a Unitarian as well as a Universalist and later became minister of the Unitarian church at Rockford. Cf. Western Conference Reports, op. cit., p. 138.

though Winnetka is now a prosperous suburb, it was only a village of 584 people at the time the church was there. Monmouth was not a large community (population 5,946) and has not grown rapidly. (The present population is 9,046.)

The churches which failed to become established were, with the exceptions noted above, located in small towns or villages. On the other hand, the successful surviving churches have been located in cities and in suburbs.

Streator is the only church which survives as an active church for more than ten years but failed to last for at least thirty-five years. The community in which it was located is different from those in which the other churches were founded. The church was founded when Streator was growing rapidly. Its population more than doubled from 1880 to 1890, growing from 5,157 to 11,414. The church was organized in 1892. From 1890 to 1900 the town grew to 14,079. After this the population became static. The fact that the church was located in a rapidly growing community which then became static may account for its unusual tenacity. The influx of new people and the probable financial prosperity accompanying the boom gave it a chance to get more of a start towards self-sufficiency than would otherwise have been possible.

The indivdualistic independent churches are different from the missionary churches. They are characteristically urban and ignore the existence of other Unitarian churches. That is to say their founders do not hesitate to compete with the already established groups. The nature of an independent church has been discussed in an earlier chapter. It should be merely noted that no church which was founded as this type of church by a person of Unitarian denominational background or under Unitarian auspices has become established in Illinois. Churches of this type have

been organized in a first class city, Chicago, a second class city, Aurora, and a small town, Sterling. In every case they have failed. Their failure seems to be completely independent of the kind of community the founder selects. The only place in which a church failed to become established in a city which is now 30,000 or above, or was not succeeded by a Universalist church, was Aurora. In this city the church was of an individualistic type.

Such information as is available suggests that most of the unsuccessful churches were of two types theologically. The missionary churches were conservative theologically. The independent churches coupled radical theological beliefs with an opposition to denominationalism.

The missionaries gave their churches a conservative temper. It has been pointed out that the churches of Conant were closely identified with him. Compared to the other men of his day Conant was a theological conservative. He tells of arguing against the identification of Unitarianism with the positions of Theodore Parker.[1] He was closely identified with the Christian denomination and interpreted Unitarianism as Biblical Christianity. The most striking feature of his conservatism is his requirement of baptism for admission to the church. He baptised people by "infusion or imersion as they preferred." (These terms as here used are defined as follows: A person is baptised by infusion when he stands with the officiating minister in the water, and the minister lifts water from the reservoir and pours it on him. Imersion consists of putting the entire body under water.) Either of these practices meant, in the West of that day, that

---

[1]This discussion of Conant's theological position is based upon numerous extracts from his diary quoted by Collyer, op. cit.

one had to be baptised in a river or creek. Conant tells of baptising a man in the Fox River and "addressing the people from the water on the importance of the ordinance." This insistence upon baptism on the part of Conant made his churches indistinguishable from those of the Christian connection. In the two cases where the theological backgrounds of the men who succeeded Conant in his churches can be traced, Kelsey of Dixon and Bradley of Belvidere, they are of Christian background and Meadville graduates.[1] (Meadville also trained Christian ministers at this period.) Bradley accepted a Christian parish after he left Belvidere. Belvidere is not listed in the Year Book for part of his tenure, and it may have even allowed its Unitarian affiliation to lapse. Ichabod Codding, who organized Lockport and Princeton, was also a member of the denomination. He gathered a church at Princeton composed of Christians, Unitarians, and Universalists. This suggests a conservative tenor in Codding's theology. Codding was not a trained Unitarian minister.[2] These men were all radicals on the subject of slavery and were vigorous abolitionists. Part of their cooperation with the Unitarians can be explained on this basis.

Less definite information is available for those churches where the background of the minister is not available. In some cases all that is known of the church is its name. Some of the names definitely suggest a conservative position. Tremont, Delavan, and Winnetka carried the name "Liberal Christian Church." This name may not necessarily mean conservatism, but in those

---

[1] Catalogue of the Meadville Theological School, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

[2] Codding was not a graduate of either Meadville or Harvard and never attended either school (as is shown by their catalogues). The description in Cooke, op. cit., p. 168, suggests he was untrained.

cases where a church had some connection with the Christian denomination the word "Christian" appeared in its title. Such is the case at Geneva, Buda, and Princeton. On the other hand, churches of purely Unitarian origin used such names as Unitarian, Free Congregational, or merely Congregational. In the cases of Jacksonville and Monmouth the name suggests a strictly Unitarian character. In the case of Monmouth the name "Unity Church" gives a suggestion of radical connections, for this name was widely used in this period by the liberals in the Western Conference. In other words definite information as to the theological position of churches is available in very few cases. Such information as is available suggests that the short term churches were conservative rather than radical in their theology.

The character of the individualistic churches has been discussed before. Their ministers were at least unconventional if not radical. Seward Baker, for instance, graduated from Meadville and instead of taking a Unitarian parish organized an independent church of his own. Helsing's Church of the Brotherhood was denied denominational support because of its close proximity to another Unitarian Church.[1]

The ministry of these churches varied. Most of the missionaries were without complete theological training. Conant had had a year at Harvard,[2] Codding was without Unitarian Theological training. The men who succeeded them in their missionary churches were mostly Meadville graduates. Bradley, who succeeded Conant at Belvidere, and Kelsey, who succeeded Conant at Dixon, were trained at Meadville. Both were of Christian background and main-

---

[1]Curtis Reese thinks that Helsing may have received some aid but not a significant amount. (Personal interview.)

[2]General Catalogue of the Divinity School of Harvard University, 1920, published by the University, Cambridge, 1920, p. 58.

tained an association with their Christian origin. At Galena Conant was succeeded by G. W. Woodward, a Harvard graduate. He later succeeded Conant at Geneva. Unlike the Meadville graduates mentioned above he had had experience as a Unitarian minister. It is interesting to note, however, that Geneva was his last church, for he served with the Army as a Chaplain during the Civil War and never held another parish. The ministers of these short term churches, with few exceptions, show a lack of permanent attachment to Unitarianism. As has been pointed out some of them were as much Christians as Unitarians and others left the Unitarian ministry.

The short term churches may be characterized as falling into two classes: individualistic independent churches and those which were not. The independent churches were founded by men who objected in some way to the Unitarian denomination, and these churches were usually in urban centers. The other churches were organized on the whole by individual missionaries in smaller communities. They were characterized by a relatively conservative theology.

Eight churches, or approximately 20 per cent of the total, collapsed after having existed for at least thirty-five years. With the exception of Moline these churches had notably long ministries. Augustus Conant was at Geneva for sixteen years and was its founding minister. Chester Covel was at Buda for thirty-one years as an active minister. He founded the church and except for a two year period when he turned the church over to Virgil H. Brown, 1892-1894, he was the active minister until 1899. In addition to this he took over Sheffield when it was two years old and remained as minister there for twelve years. Even after he left Sheffield he was only a few miles away at Buda. Jasper

Douthit was at Shelbyville for approximately thirty-four years as an active minister and founded the churches there. Milton J. Miller was at Genesseo for thirty-two years. He not only founded the church, he gave it a parsonage and left it an endowment. These churches were all small town churches founded by a man who stayed for a considerable period, or in the case of Sheffield were supervised from a nearby town. All Souls is different. It was located in Chicago and was a large urban metropolitan church. While Jones was not the founder of the church, he did completely reorganize the remnants of the old Fourth Unitarian Church so that the members of his congregation considered All Souls a new church. All Souls is unique among Chicago churches in that it experimented with independency after having been a Unitarian church. It is the only Unitarian church in Illinois to go independent and to try to avoid the denominational label. Its situation is thus different from that of the other churches discussed in this section. From the time the church moved into Lincoln Center and became independent it began to decline. By Jones' death a combination of circumstances, including his opposition to the First World War, had left it very weak. The cure tried for its weakness was even more independency. The church moved to a newly constructed social settlement center in the Jackson Park area of Chicago, where it soon died.[1]

The other churches which were in small towns are very much alike. They were founded by a minister who remained for a long period of time. And after the founding minister left the church, or its immediate vicinity in the case of Sheffield, the churches declined.

These churches resembled the short-term churches except

---

[1]Curtis Reese, Personal interview.

for the long tenure of the founding minister. All Souls Church, after it became independent, resembled the other independent churches which were founded at various times in Chicago. The small town churches resemble the small town churches which failed to become established. Douthit like Conant was a conservative. Covel was a liberal Christian. Milton J. Miller had been a Christian minister. These churches resemble the short term churches in their location in the small communities of slow rate of growth, in the conservative position of their ministers, and in the individualistic character of their founding. They differed from them in the long tenure of the founding minister. All Souls differs from the other independent churches in that its minister had been at the church a long time before the church became independent, and it had existed as an established church before the independency was introduced. This suggests that all these churches were able to become established because of the long period of work of the founding minister.

The one exception to the long tenure rule is Moline. As has been pointed out before, churches which were established in cities of thirty thousand or more (as of today) have seldom failed to become established or to survive. Aside from Moline the only attempts which failed to become established were either individualistic or where a Universalist church succeeded the Unitarian. Aside from Moline the only church which has died in a community of thirty thousand or more is All Souls in Chicago, which is discussed above. The history of Moline shows no extreme divergence from that of churches in similar communities which have survived. Moline is of the same size and rate of growth as the other communities which support active churches. It has had its difficulties and it declined during the period in which de-

cline was general. It may possibly have been somewhat more conservative than the other churches, but this is not demonstrable, and the difference may not have been significant. Only two differences can be found between Moline and the other churches in the thirty to one hundred thousand group. Moline is adjacent to Davenport, Iowa, in which there is a strong Unitarian church. This is the only case in Illinois in which two Unitarian churches have been established in a metropolitan area of this size. The metropolitan area of Davenport which includes Rock Island as well as Moline has a population of 174,000 as of 1940. The only other metropolitan area in which there is more than one church is Chicago, which has a population of approximately 4,500,000 in 1940. This raises the possibility that competition with the Davenport church has kept Moline small. The church was organized with the aid of a minister from Davenport and has some of the characteristics of being a "second church." The members of the present church do not feel that this is an explanation of their difficulty. They believe that Davenport is too far away for people in Moline to go to church conveniently. The members would prove this by the lack of members of the Davenport church in Moline.[1] On the other hand, the fact that there is another Unitarian church in the community may have affected the attitude of other Unitarians as to the necessity for a church in Moline. The other difference between Moline and other churches in similar communities which have survived is in the manner in which it recovered from the denominational depression in Illinois. As has been mentioned all of the churches in Illinois met a period of considerable difficulty. The other churches met this problem on their own initiative or with the aid of the Western Conference. They called ministers sometimes

---

[1]Mrs. Dufva, Personal interview.

just out of school on the recommendation of Mr. Reese or upon their own initiative. Moline, on the other hand, has been aided by the American Unitarian Association. Moline had no minister after 1911 and became inactive. In 1918 Newton B. Knapp of Davenport, Iowa, reopened the church. Moline briefly shared a minister with Geneseo. The first full time minister the church had after its period of dormancy was Clara Cook Helvie, who remained until 1925. Note that this is the period in which the other churches of Illinois begin to meet their crisis. The church was hardly in existence when Mrs. Helvie arrived, for she reports only nineteen members. The church grew and by 1925 had fifty-six members. The budget also increased as did the size of the Sunday School. The next minister, whom the church called upon the recommendation of the American Unitarian Association, persuaded the church to replace its church building, which was debt-free, with a new structure. The new building was designed to have business properties on the lower floor and the church on the second floor so that the rent for the commercial properties would help support the church. The members were reluctant to accept the proposal but finally did so.[1] The building was financed by bonds and a loan from the American Unitarian Association, which therefore endorsed the move. The church is now in a very serious condition, for the total income from the commercial property and part of the upstairs, which has been rented out, merely pays the interest on the bonds. This financial catastrophe along with the antagonisms between the minister and the members of the church disrupted it. Its membership has continually declined since that time. Moline was in the same condition as the other churches in Illinois though perhaps it was not as strong to begin with as many of the others. Their attempts

---

[1] Ibid.

to make a recovery were successful and its was abortive.

The successful Illinois churches, that is those which became established and which survive today, constitute twelve out of the forty-one churches or approximately 30 per cent of the total. Such churches were founded by local rather than missionary activity. Alton, Bloomington, First Church in Chicago, Rockford, Quincy, and Urbana were formed by interested local groups in towns and cities in which there were no Unitarian churches. Chicago and Rockford were organized on the initiative of the local group composed of transplanted New England Unitarians. They organized a church and called a minister without help from the outside. Alton and Quincy received aid in their organization from William G. Eliot of St. Louis. There were already interested persons in these communities, but the church was not organized until Eliot arrived. The church at Urbana was organized in a University community by a group of professors of Unitarian background. Here the American Unitarian Association aided the group. At Bloomington the local group was not of Unitarian background but learned of the new liberal principles of Charles Gordon Ames through a letter he wrote a friend there. He was called to be their minister, they having organized a church upon the receipt of his letter.[1]

Other churches were founded as members of established churches moved into new areas of Chicago. Unity Church and Third Church were formed as a result of a movement into the North Side and West Side of members of First Church. (Beverly is not included in the statistics but may be given as another example of this phenomenon. It was formed by the movement of members of

---

[1]Charles Gordon Ames, A Spiritual Autobiography, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1913, pp. 140-141.

Peoples Liberal.) The suburban churches at Hinsdale and Evanston were founded as Unitarians moved into those suburbs. These churches were not composed entirely of members or descendants of members of other Unitarian churches. The Unitarian group merely gave a nucleus for the church. Peoples Liberal and Peoples entered the denomination after having existed as independent churches. Peoples was established as an independent church. Peoples Liberal had become independent after having been Universalist. (Rockford entered the denomination after having been an independent church. The Unitarian church here did not become independent but a large part of its membership was absorbed by an independent liberal church, the Church of the Christian Union.)

These churches are all now in communities which are either in excess of thirty thousand or suburbs of Chicago. This is in contrast to the preceding group which have collapsed, for, except for Moline and All Souls, they are in communities that are smaller than thirty thousand. The communities in which the established churches were founded were important centers at the times that the churches were organized. Chicago early rose to prominence in Illinois as a great manufacturing, commercial, and transportation center. As has been mentioned earlier in the paper, Alton was a thriving commercial center and is now a manufacturing community. Quincy was a river port and is now a railroad and commercial center. Rockford has always been one of the larger communities in the state, Bloomington is a distributing center for the surrounding region and in addition the site of an important state college. (The college was organized as the result of the activities of a member of the church.) Urbana-Champaign is not only the site of the University of Illinois but a marketing and distributing center for the surrounding countryside. It is very difficult without

an elaborate and detailed sociological study to decide if the commercial, cultural, and economic importance of these communities in the past bore the same relation to the state as a whole as it now does. It is also impossible without such a study to compare these communities in their importance to the communities included in the preceding groups such as Jacksonville and Dixon. As the communities in which churches survived were larger than the communities in which churches failed to become established or failed after being established (the exceptions have already been discussed under these headings) and grew more rapidly, it seems reasonable to suppose that they were more important urban centers throughout their history. At any rate there is a difference in the present day. Whether thirty thousand is the threshold below which Unitarianism is not able to reach is of course not demonstrated. There has not been a concerted effort to start Unitarian churches in communities which now are about twenty thousand. Jacksonville is the only town of this size which has had a Unitarian church. At any rate Unitarianism has maintained itself very well in communities of thirty thousand or above.

Available evidence indicates that the successful churches were liberal in their theological positions. The church histories of Alton, Quincy, and Bloomington substantiate this. This also is true of Urbana, of Third Church in Chicago, and of Evanston. Evanston was founded by James Vila Blake, who was an outstanding Universal Ethical Theist. Rockford has not been in the denomination for much of its history but was definitely liberal theologically. The only two churches with conservative records in this group are First Church and Unity in Chicago. Robert Collyer was of Methodist background and quite conservative theologically. The church has followed this tendency since. The

record of First Church is varied, for it adopted the title of Church of the Messiah and became quite conservative. In the author's opinion it could scarcely be called so at present. During the Western Issue First Church and Unity Church withdrew from the Western Conference.

A number of outstanding liberal leaders have been associated with these churches. Both Fredrich L. Hosmer and James Vila Blake were ministers of the church at Quincy. Blake was also a minister at Third Church and founded the church at Evanston. William Channing Gannett served Hinsdale. Bloomington was founded by Charles Gordon Ames. Curtis Reese was minister at Alton. Rockford, Peoples, and Peoples Liberal have not been in the denomination for a very long period. Thus most of the churches in this group that have been in the denomination for a long period have had at least one outstanding leader of radical theology as their minister. This would suggest that they provided a congenial atmosphere for such ministers.

Of the two conservative members of this group, First Church has recovered from its decline by adopting a position which is certainly more liberal than it formerly had. It not only dropped the title of the Church of the Messiah but under the ministry of Dr. Von Ogden Vogt attempted to develop liturgical forms which were in harmony with modern thought.[1] Unity Church is certainly the most conservative Unitarian church in Chicago and vicinity if not the entire state. It is the weakest of these churches and has failed to recover its strength as the others have done.

These churches have maintained a loyalty to the denomina-

---

[1]Dr. Vogt's opinions on this subject are set forth in his Art and Religion, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1921.

tion and have not experimented with independency. Peoples Liberal and Peoples have been independent churches, but this was before they were ever Unitarian churches. Peoples Liberal was originally the First Universalist Church of Englewood and later became independent, while Peoples was organized as an independent church. The church at Rockford presents a unique case, which has been discussed before.

The ministers of the churches in this group have had varied backgrounds. They have been served by both Meadville and Harvard graduates, both by men who were experienced and inexperienced, and by men who had Unitarian background and those who had been ministers in other denominations. There is no statistical evidence that one kind of minister was more successful than the other. Each type has produced its church builders, its mediocrities, and its church wreckers.

At the conclusion of this discussion of church characteristics it is well to take note of opinions which are frequently advanced concerning the nature of church decline.

It is sometimes alleged that an inexperienced ministry is bad for a church. Churches are supposedly weakened if they have to take inexperienced ministers. There is no evidence to support this contention in Illinois. On the contrary some of the most successful revivals in Illinois churches have taken place under inexperienced ministers. On the other hand men who have had considerable experience have succeeded in disrupting churches. Alton, Quincy, Peoples Liberal, and Evanston have in recent years come out of their period of decline and stagnation under inexperienced Meadville graduates. On the other hand Third Church, First Church, and Bloomington have had experienced men in the same stage. Conversely Unity Church has never had an inexper-

ienced man. It was Robert Collyer's first Unitarian parish, but he had been a Methodist minister for some time. Even more strikingly Moline has all but died under the ministry of experienced men. The first minister of Alton came there directly from Harvard. Geneseo has only had one inexperienced minister yet has declined.

The fact that a church has periods of decline and difficulty does not necessarily mean that the church has no hope for the future. All the churches in Illinois have had periods of difficulty. As has been mentioned, all the churches declined from 1900 to 1920, and by 1920 they were all in a dangerously weak condition. Quincy was debating whether to close up or affiliate with the Congregational church. Third Church was without a building or any tangible existence as a religious institution. Yet both of these churches recovered. Alton met a series of disasters: it had no minister for four years; its next minister ended his career abruptly. The church was left with only eighty members in 1935. Under a new minister the church began to grow and in 1945 had 148 members and a budget of $5,000. Churches have been revived in recent times from an almost defunct state even where the communities were only slightly larger than thirty thousand.

It is sometimes asserted that the longer the pastorate the better. This is not necessarily true in Illinois. While a series of extremely short pastorates would be detrimental to a church, the direction in which Alton was moving was reversed by a pastorate of only three and one-half years. Peoples Liberal was built up and Beverly organized in a pastorate that only lasted five years. On the other hand extremely long pastorates are not necessarily helpful to the church in the long run. There is a

suggestion that a long pastorate may make possible the establishment of a church in a small community where it would otherwise not get a foothold. This situation has been discussed above. The end of a long pastorate is a difficult period for a church to face. In every case in which a minister has served a church in Illinois for a long period, for fifteen years or over the church has had difficulty in making an adjustment. Either the church declined toward the end of this ministry or it had difficulty in accepting a new minister. Extremely long pastorates frequently leave a legacy of personal attachment to the minister which jeopardizes the future of the church.

Whether or not the church requires economic aid in its early years is not predictive of whether it will be self-supporting in the future. Almost every church which existed in Illinois has had aid of some kind from the American Unitarian Association, the Western Conference, or individual churches. The fact that a church was an exception to this rule was not an indication of its future success. Geneseo was not aided in its early years but has collapsed.[1]

The gross size of a community is not strictly correlated with the size of the church or the ability of the church to succeed. The most significant figure in Illinois is thirty thousand inhabitants. (As no church has been organized in a community which is now between 25,000 and 30,000, the threshold may be a little lower.) To date no Unitarian church has successfully maintained itself in a community that is smaller than this today, except in suburbs of Chicago. The church at Geneva, which is the strongest church of the group which do not have full time settled ministers and is something of a borderline case, is also a border-

---

[1]Western Conference Minutes, op. cit., p. 294.

line case in this respect. It has become something of a suburb of Chicago. If the community is above thirty thousand, the correlation of the size of the church with the population is slight. Chicago has more churches than any other city. Aside from this gross difference there is no correlation with population. For instance Alton has a population of 31,255 and a church membership of 148. Bloomington has a population of 32,868 and a church membership of 109. Urbana-Champaign (the two towns constitute one community except for governmental purposes) has a population of 37,366 and has a membership of 38. This figure, however, is different from the others, for there is also a Universalist church in Urbana, and this is not the case in any other community in which there are Unitarian churches except Chicago. Quincy has a population of 40,469 and a membership of 119. Rockford has a population of 84,637, and the population of the Rockford metropolitan area is 105,259. (The other afore-listed places do not have metropolitan areas.) It has a membership of 167. Thus outside Chicago the largest and smallest communities have the largest memberships. When one considers that Rockford is approximately three times the size of Alton, this contrast becomes still more striking. With the exception of Urbana all these churches are economically self-sufficient. It is commonly asserted that a minimum of 100,000 persons in a city is required to support a Unitarian church. This claim is not true for Illinois. The question may then be raised: Could Unitarians now start a church in a locality where there were fewer than 100,000 people? There can be no real answer to this question, for the most recent attempt to start such a church was Urbana, and this church has been permanently aided on the grounds that it is a university church. It suffered from an especial handicap in that there was an estab-

lished Universalist church in the same community, and its membership has been confined to the University community. An attempt was made about the same time to start a church at Aurora, but this was on an individualistic basis, and such a basis has always failed even in Chicago. Therefore, there has been no real attempt in the present century to start churches in towns of between 30,000 and 100,000.

In considering the possibility of starting churches in towns of between 30,000 and 100,000 population one should consider the following facts: only one church which became established in such a community has become inactive; only three churches which were organized in communities which are now 30,000 or over failed to become established; two of these churches were followed by Universalist churches and the other was Aurora, which is discussed above; churches have recovered from almost complete collapse in such communities and are now thriving institutions. There is no reason to assume that it would be impossible to organize and establish a church in such a community. The hypothesis that churches cannot now be established in such communities could, therefore, be demonstrated only by an experiment, and such an experiment has not been performed in this state. Hence, there is no scientific reason for assuming that it is impossible to organize and establish Unitarian churches in Illinois communities of between 30,000 and 100,000

The factors set forth above indicate that it may be possible for Unitarianism to expand into new communities in Illinois. There are several communities of over 30,000 in Illinois which have never had a Unitarian church and which do not now have a Universalist church. In addition there is Aurora, which had a Unitarian church for only four years. It would be an interesting

experiment to see if Unitarian churches could be planted in Aurora, population 47,170; Danville, population 36,919; Decatur, population 59,305 and metropolitan district population 65,764; Springfield, population 75,503 and metropolitan district population 89,484; and Waukegan, population 34,241. All of these communities are within the population range which now supports Unitarian churches. Decatur in addition to being fairly large, supports a college, James Millikin University. Springfield is the state capital. It would be unscientific to say that it is impossible to start Unitarian churches in these communities.

In summary, a number of items regarding the sociological background of Unitarianism in Illinois have been demonstrated in the course of this thesis.

The background of Unitarianism was that of a New England culture transplanted to the frontier. The areas in which the early churches were founded were those of New England settlement. It is difficult to say when the attachment of Unitarianism to the New England culture broke, but most of the churches in Illinois which survive were established against a New England background.

The historical development in Illionois moved from a few scattered churches on the frontier to the present situation in which there are churches in Chicago and its suburbs and most of the important cities in the state. Unitarianism developed more and more churches and a bigger constituency until the time of the Western Issue. The period of most rapid development was immediately after the Civil War. After the breach of the Western Issue was healed, Unitarianism was in a desperate condition. Since that time it has revived considerably. This revival was the result of local and Western Conference activity, rather than activity of the American Unitarian Association. Throughout its his-

tory Illinois Unitarianism has been more successful in establishing and maintaining churches as the result of local and Western Conference activity than as a result of national activity.

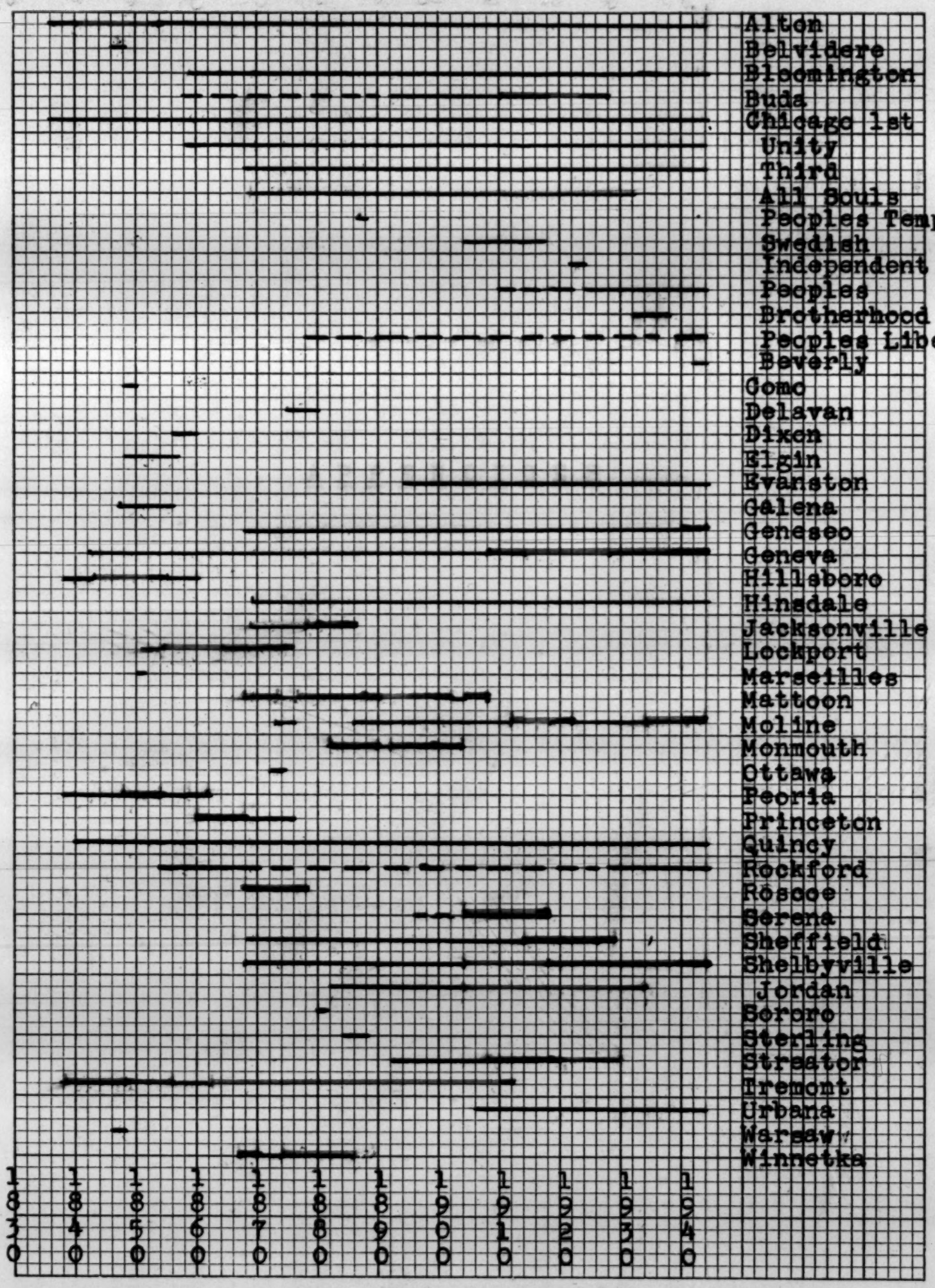
Churches in Illinois were founded in several ways. Churches were founded by missionaries like Conant and by mission projects like that of Jasper Douthit in Shelby County. This method of founding churches has been conspicuously unsuccessful. Churches have been founded by individuals with particular ideas of what a church should be, the so-called independent church. These are also unsuccessful. It should be noted that the American Unitarian Association has frequently aided such ventures, including some directed to immigrant groups. This aid has not enabled such churches to successfully establish themselves. The most successful method of starting churches in Illinois has been by local activity. A group is organized with the aid of nearby ministers and aided by the Western Conference and local churches. This is the origin of most of the successful churches in Illinois.

An examination of the churches in Illinois demonstrates that the first ten years of a church's existence is its most crucial period. If a church survives for ten years, it is likely to last at least thirty-five years. The only exceptions occur when a church which would have otherwise collapsed is kept alive by continual outside aid. This suggests that the first ten years is a kind of establishment period for a church in which it becomes institutionalized and develops some degree of permanence.

At present churches can survive in communities of 30,000 or more. (The smallest city supporting a church actively at the present is about 30,000, but as there have been no churches in cities in the 25,000 to 30,000 range, perhaps a somewhat smaller community could support a church.) All churches established in

communities of 30,000 or over, that is the communities are now of this size, have survived with the exception of All Souls Church in Chicago, which became an independent church and died. Most of the churches organized in communities which are now over 30,000 became established. The exceptions are individualistic churches in Chicago and one in Aurora, and two cases in which a Unitarian church was succeeded by a Universalist church. In other words liberalism in religion is able to maintain itself successfully in Illinois at present on a population of 30,000. Furthermore there is no reason, as has been shown above, to say that it is impossible to establish new churches in communities of over 30,000 which have no Unitarian or Universalist church.

# GRAPH II
## THE LIFE SPANS OF CHURCHES
### Showing Active and Inactive Periods




Active
Semi-active (supply, lay, or student preaching)
Inactive
Church not member of American Unitarian Association

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I

## A NOTE ON SOURCES

Another fact has been demonstrated by the preparation of this thesis. This is not a conclusion of the thesis but a conclusion about sources. The statistics of the American Unitarian Association as published in the Year Book and the Annual Report are insufficient, inconsistent, and unscientific. There is no possibility of drawing conclusions as to trends in Unitarianism from these statistics alone, nor is it possible to get a true picture of the development of individual churches. The statistics have to be weighted and corrected and supplemented by other data. Furthermore, for a period the statistics were dropped from the Year Book. Research would be difficult enough under these circumstances, but the criteria used to determine such matters as membership and consituency have been changed from time to time and without adequate explanation.[1] Furthermore, the statistical methods used are such as to give little confidence in the statistics in general.[2] Despite the fact that the Commission on Planning and Review complained about the way in which the membership of the denomination is estimated, this method is still used. It gives an entirely erroneous picture of what is happening in the denomination.

For most of the period covered by this thesis the Minutes of the Western Conference give reports of the activities of

---

[1] Frederick M. Eliot, op. cit., p.

[2] Ibid., p.

churches which make possible a reasonably adequate picture of what has actually happened. On those few occasions when the Western Conference collected statistics for its minutes, they were far more comprehensive than those of the Year Book. The reports of the churches as to what they were doing are also very valuable. Unfortunately in latter years these reports have not been filed.

The possibility of adequate studies of the sociological factors affecting Unitarian churches depends upon more adequate and accurate statistics being collected by the various denominational agencies.

## APPENDIX II

## A HUMANIST MANIFESTO[1]

The time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs. Religions the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience. In every field of human activity, the vital movement is now in the direction of a candid and explicit humanism. In order that religious humanism may be better understood we, the undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations which we believe the facts of our contemporary life demonstrate.

There is great danger of a final, and we believe fatal, identification of the word religion with doctrines and methods which have lost their significance and which are powerless to solve the problem of human living in the Twentieth Century. Religions have always been means for realizing the highest values of life. Their end has been accomplished through the interpretation of the total environing situation (theology or world view), the sense of values resulting therefrom (goal or ideal), and the technique (cult), established for realizing the satisfactory life. A change in any of these factors results in alteration of the outward forms of religion. This fact explains the changefulness of

---

[1]A Humanist Manifesto was first published in The New Humanist (First Series), for May-June, 1933, Volume VI, No. 3.

religions through the centuries. But through all changes religion itself remains constant in its quest for abiding values, an inseparable feature of human life.

Today man's larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and his deeper appreciation of brotherhood, have created a situation which requires a new statement of the means and purposes of religion. Such a vital, fearless, and frank religion capable of furnishing adequate social goals and personal satisfactions may appear to many people as a complete break with the past. While this age does owe a vast debt to the traditional religions, it is none the less obvious that any religion that can hope to be a synthesizing and dynamic force for today must be shaped for the needs of this age. To establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present. It is a responsibility which rests upon this generation. We therefore affirm the following:

First: Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.

Second: Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process.

Third: Holding an organic view of life, humanists find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.

Fourth: Humanism recognizes that man's religious culture and civilization, as clearly depicted by anthropology and history, are the product of a gradual development due to his interaction with his natural environment and with his social heritage. The individual born into a particular culture is largely molded by that culture.

Fifth: Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. Obviously humanism does not

deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but it does insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relations to human needs. Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method.

Sixth: We are convinced that the time has passed for theism, deism, modernism, and the several varieties of "new thought."

Seventh: Religion consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant. Nothing human is alien to the religious. It includes labor, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship, recreation--all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living. The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained.

Eighth: Religious humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now. This is the explanation of the humanist's social passion.

Ninth: In the place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.

Tenth: It follows that there will be no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural.

Eleventh: Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and sup-

ported by custom. We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking.

Twelfth: Believing that religion must work increasingly for joy in living, religious humanists aim to foster the creative in man and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfactions of life.

Thirteenth: Religious humanism maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. The intelligent evaluation, transformation, control, and direction of such associations and institutions with a view to the enhancement of human life is the purpose and program of humanism. Certainly religious institutions, their ritualistic forms, ecclesiastical methods, and communal activities must be reconstituted as rapidly as experience allows, in order to function effectively in the modern world.

Fourteenth: The humanists are firmly convinced that existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted. A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established to the end that the equitable distribution of the means of life be possible. The goal of humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good. Humanists demand a shared life in a shared world.

Fifteenth and last: We assert that humanism will: (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from it; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for a few. By this positive morale and intention humanism will be

guided, and from this perspective and alignment the techniques and efforts of humanism will flow.

So stand the theses of religious humanism. Though we consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate, the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind. Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement. He must set intelligence and will to the task.

(Signed) J. A. C. Fagginger Auer, E. Burdette Backus, Harry Elmer Barnes, L. M. Birkhead, Raymond B. Bragg, Edwin Arthur Burtt, Ernest Caldecott, A, J. Carlson, John Dewey, Albert C. Dieffenbach, John H. Dietrich, Bernard Fantus,* William Floyd,* F. H. Hankins, A. Eustace Haydon, Llewellyn Jones, Robert Morss Lovett, Harold P. Marley, R. Lester Mondale, Charles Francis Potter, John Herman Randall, Jr., Curtis W. Reese, Oliver L. Reiser, Roy Wood Sellars, Clinton Lee Scott, Maynard Shipley,* W. Frank Swift,* V. T. Thayer, Eldred C. Vanderlaan, Joseph Walker,* Jacob J. Weinstein, Frank S. C. Wicks, David Rhys Williams, Edwin H. Wilson.

---

*Deceased.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Books


Ames, Charles Gordon. A Spiritual Autobiography. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1913.

Alvord, Clarence Walworth. "The Illinois Country," Vol. I of The Centennial History of Illinois. Clarence Walworth Alvord (ed.). Springfield: The Illinois Centennial Commission, 1920.

Beard, Charles A. and Mary R. A Basic History of the United States. New York: New Home Library, 1944.

Bogart, Earnest Ludlow, and Thompson, Charles Manfred. "The Industrial State," Vol. IV of The Centennial History of Illinois. Clarence Walworth Alvord (ed.). Springfield: The Illinois Centennial Commission, 1920.

Bogart, Earnest Ludlow, and Mathews, John Murry. "The Modern Commonwealth," Vol. V of The Centennial History of Illinois. Clarence Walworth Alvord (ed.). Springfield: The Illinois Centennial Commission, 1920.

Burtt, Edwin A. Types of Religious Philosophy. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939.

Cole, Arthur Charles. "The Era of the Civil War," Vol. III of The Centennial History of Illinois. Clarence Walworth Alvord (ed.). Springfield: The Illinois Centennial Commission, 1919.

Collyer, Robert. A Man in Earnest: Life of A. H. Conant. Boston: Horace B. Fuller, 1868.

Cooke, George Willis. Unitarianism in America. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903.

Douthit, Jasper. Jasper Douthit's Story. Boston: American Unitarian Association, no date.

Eliot, Frederick M. (Commission chairman). Unitarians Face a New Age. A report of the Commission of Appraisal to the American Unitarian Association. Boston, 1936.

Foote, Henry Wilder (ed.). Hymns of the Spirit. Boston: The Beacon Press, Inc. (fifth printing), 1940.

General Catalogue of the Divinity School of Harvard University. Cambridge: The University, 1920.

General Catalogue of the Meadville Theological School. Boston: The Beacon Press, 1930.

Gist, Noel P., and Halbert, L. A. Urban Society (sec. ed.). New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1941.

Hagood, Margaret Jarman. Statistics for Sociologists. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, Inc., 1941.

History of Tazwell County, Illinois. Chicago: Chas. C. Chapman and Company, 1879.

Morrill, Milo True. A History of the Christian Denomination in America. Dayton, Ohio: Christian Publishing Association, 1912.

Pease, Theodore Calvin. The Frontier State, Vol. II of The Centennial History of Illinois. Clarence Walworth Alvord (ed.). Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1918.

Taxpayers & Voters of Bureau County, Ill. Chicago: H. F. Kett and Co., 1877.

Publications

U. S. Bureau of the Census. Census of the United States (Fifth to Fifteenth, inclusive), Respective volumes entitled Population. Washington: Government Printing Office.

The Year Book of the American Unitarian Association. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1846-1859, 1870-.

Pamphlets and Private Publications

Directory of the Peoples Liberal Church of Chicago, 1944-1945. Chicago: Privately published by the church, 405 West 56th Street, 1944.

Geneseo Centennial History. Geneseo, Illinois: Historical Committee of the Geneseo Centennial Association, 1936.

Hornor, Ester. History of the First Unitarian Society of Chicago. Chicago: Published by the society, 57th and Woodlawn, 1936. (This work contains no page numbers.)

Montgomery, E. B. A Sketch of History of One Hundred Years of Unitarian Church of Quincy, Illinois. Quincy, Illinois: Published by the church, 1479 Hampshire Street, 1939.

Robbins, Wallace W. A Century of Unitarian Religion in Alton. Alton, Illinois: Published by the society, 110 East Third Street, 1936.

The Year Book of All Souls Church of Chicago, 1905. Chicago: Privately published, 1905. A complete set of the Year Books of All Souls Church is in the library of Abraham Lincoln Center, 700 Oakwood Boulevard, Chicago.

## Articles

Encyclopedia Britannica. Fourteenth ed. Vol. 12 Article, "Illinois."

Williams, George H. "Current Trends in Unitarian Theology." The Christian Register. Vol. 124, No. 2, February 1945.

World Almanac, 1944. Article, "Illinois," and statistics on "Urban Places in the United States."

## Unpublished Material

Crompton, Arnold. "The History of Unitarianism in the Middle West to the Issue in the West." Unpublished batchelor of Divinity dissertation. The Meadville Theological School, 1939.

Minutes of the Western Unitarian Conference. Manuscript in two volumes. Volume I, 1854-1879. Volume II, 1880-. Custody of the Western Unitarian Conference, 700 Oakwood Blvd., Chicago, Illinois.

Robbins, Wallace W. "The Life of Jasper Douthit." Unpublished B.D. dissertation. The Meadville Theological School, 1935.

## Personal Interviews

Dufva, Mrs. Frank, nee Alberta Crampton. A charter member of the Unitarian Church of Moline, Illinois. Interviewed at her home Feb. 11, 1945, in Moline.

Reese, Curtis W. Dean of Abraham Lincoln Center, President of the Western Unitarian Conference, and former secretary of the conference. Interviewed on a number of occasions in the Spring of 1945.